WITH ROBERTS TO PRETORIA

G. A. HENTY.

~~Rev. F. J. Howard~~

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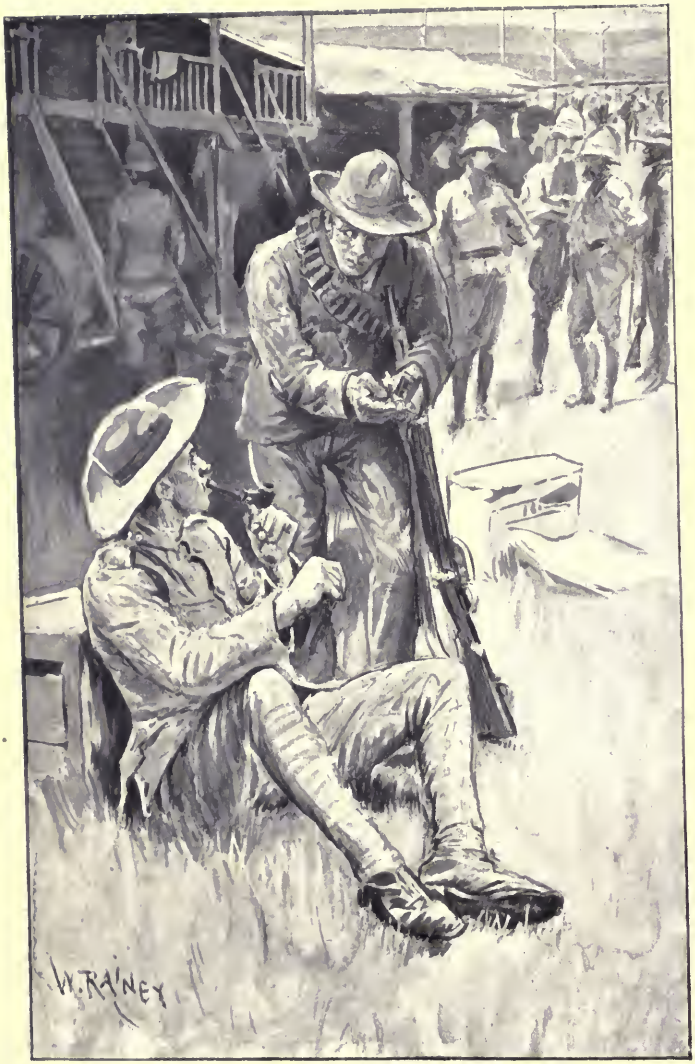

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YORKE MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

WITH ROBERTS TO PRETORIA

A TALE OF

THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

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BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "With Buller in Natal" "In the Irish Brigade" "For Name and Fame" "With Cochrane the Dauntless" &c.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I. AND A MAP

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1902

PREFACE

The war in South Africa may be roughly divided into three parts. First, The desperate fighting in Natal, which culminated in the relief of Ladysmith. Second, The advance towards Kimberley begun by Lord Methuen but arrested at Magersfontein, and renewed with a vastly greater force by Lord Roberts and pushed forward to Pretoria, involving the relief of Kimberley and the capture of Cronje at Paardeberg, but unmarked by any resistance comparable with that experienced by Buller. Third, The advance to Komati Poort, the breaking down of all organized opposition, and the degeneration of the war into isolated efforts by guerilla bands capable of annoyance but powerless to affect the issue. The first of these chapters was told last year in *With Buller in Natal.*

The second phase of the struggle did not afford such examples of warfare on a large scale as might have been anticipated. The operations of Lord Methuen for the relief of Kimberley were brought to a stand-still by the inadequacy of the comparatively small force under his command for the task of breaking down the opposition of the Boer army, holding, like that before Ladysmith, a position of immense natural strength. With the advance, however, of the army under General Roberts, resistance on a large scale virtually collapsed.

It might have been supposed that the Boers would resist the advance upon their capital as sturdily as they had opposed the relief of Ladysmith, and that at least they would fight one great battle supported by the forts with which they had surrounded

Pretoria. It turned out otherwise. Although brave and tenacious when fighting under the cover of rocks, the Boers had not the heart to venture even once to face the British in the open, and were turned out of one after another of their carefully-prepared positions without making any determined stand. After Cronje's force had been captured at Paardeberg, and the force that had advanced to his assistance driven off the road to Bloemfontein, no serious opposition was offered to the advance to Pretoria.

The third phase was marked at first by many exciting incidents, but by no great battle. The Boers defended some of the positions taken up by them with bravery and determination, but when once the railway to Komati Poort had fallen into our hands the war degenerated into a guerilla struggle. It was a war of raids, sometimes by a comparatively strong force and at others by handfuls of plunderers; a war trying and fatiguing in the extreme, and demanding extraordinary endurance on the part of our troops, but of which the end was always in sight. The obstinacy of the Boers had only the effect of bringing ruin upon their own countrymen and women; it could by no possibility alter the final result.

I have now endeavoured to recount the leading incidents in the second phase of the war, and although events have moved so rapidly that the capture of Pretoria is already an old story, I may hope that it has not yet lost its interest with British boys, and that *With Roberts to Pretoria* will meet with as favourable a reception as that given last year to its companion volume.

G. A. HENTY.

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WITH ROBERTS TO PRETORIA

CHAPTER I

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE

IT was a sad morning at the Rectory of Waverfield, in Somersetshire. The living was not a valuable one, but the rector, John Harberton, possessed a private income derived from shares in a bank in the Midlands, that had hitherto been considered a stable and flourishing institution. That morning one of the first items in the paper that met his eye was: "Failure of the Birmingham and Coventry Banking Company. Reported heavy liabilities. Wide-spread dismay."

"It is a great misfortune, my dear," the rector said, after the first exclamations of surprise and lamentation had ceased. "Still, thank God, we have our church income remaining; that cannot be touched, and we are more fortunate than many others. Naturally it will make a great difference to us, but we can do without many of the things to which we have been hitherto accustomed. Of course we must sell our horses, the brougham, and dog-cart, and content ourselves with the pony and carriage. Fortunately the girls have nearly finished their education, and it has been already arranged that our good friend here, Miss Millar, should leave at midsummer. It is a comfort to think, Miss Millar, that our misfortune will not affect you."

"Not at all, sir," the governess said. "I have already

arranged with the lady, to whom you recommended me, to enter her service at the end of the summer holidays; but I most deeply regret that such a misfortune has happened to you, and had the girls been younger I would gladly have remained to finish their education, without there being any question of salary between us."

"You are very good, Miss Millar, but happily the matter has already been arranged. The greatest difficulty will be about you, Yorke. I am afraid that there will be no possibility whatever of sending you back to Rugby."

"Don't worry about me, father," the lad said, with an effort at cheerfulness, though the thought of leaving the school he loved was a painful one indeed. "I shall get on all right somehow; and you know there was never any chance of my doing anything brilliant. Though I don't say that I shall not be sorry to leave Rugby, that is nothing beside your having to give up the horses and carriage and all sorts of other things."

"It will, of course, make a wide difference to us, Yorke," his father said gravely; "but this must be faced in the right spirit. Our lot has been an exceptionally pleasant one up to the present time, and I hope that none of us will repine. I shall henceforth be as other clergymen, having nothing but my stipend to depend upon."

"But will nothing be saved out of the wreck, John?" Mrs. Harberton asked.

"It would be as well to assume at once, Annie, that it will be all lost; and I can only trust that, when matters are gone into, all depositors who have trusted in the bank will be paid in full. Fortunately it is a limited concern, and the money I have invested elsewhere will be sufficient to pay the amount uncalled-up on our shares. Had it been otherwise, our home might have been sold up; as it is, we shall be able to keep all the surroundings to which we are accustomed. I shall at once give notice to the coachman and gardener. The boy must be kept on. He can look after the pony, and do

the rough work in the garden with the aid of a man hired for a day occasionally. One of the maids must, of course, go. We shall see how well we can manage, and I hope we shall be able to keep on the other two. We shall have to practise many little economies. Owing to the fall in the tithes and the value of the glebe land, we shall not be able to reckon upon more than £250 a year at the outside from the living, and the interest upon a few hundred pounds that may remain after the shares are paid up."

The calm tone in which the rector spoke had its effect. His wife dried her eyes; the girls, who had looked stunned at the blow which had at once swept away three-fourths of their father's income, pressed each other's hands silently, and the elder said cheerfully: "Yes, father, Bella and I will take charge of the garden, and I am sure that we shall be able to make our own dresses after a little practice, and we can make ourselves useful in all sorts of ways."

"That is the right spirit, Lucy," her father said approvingly. "We shall all be called upon to make some sacrifices, you girls not least. Although, doubtless, you will have less gaiety than you before looked forward to, you will still be able to have a good deal of society in a quiet way—more, probably, than falls to the lot of the daughters of most incumbents with slender incomes; and as we are intimate with all the gentry round, I am sure that none of those we care about knowing will turn a cold shoulder on us because we have, without any fault of our own, what is called 'come down in the world'. Those who like us for ourselves will continue to do so; those who only cared for us because of our garden-parties and dinners can be very well dispensed with. We have always been a very happy family, and, if we choose, can be the same in the future. As to Yorke, I must myself take charge of his education in future."

"Thank you, father!" Yorke said quietly. He was about to say something more, but he checked himself.

"Of course we must give up the idea of going to the skating

party in Sir William Morton's park to-morrow," Mrs. Harberton said.

"I see no reason for our doing so," the rector said gently. "We can't sell our horses and carriage in twenty-four hours, and I should certainly prefer to go. It would be but a bad example to our neighbours if it were seen that we are broken in spirit by a worldly misfortune. Many of them know that my income was chiefly drawn from the bank. I am always preaching patience and contentment to our congregation, very many of whom have suffered heavily from agricultural distress, and what I preach we can practise, and without undervaluing the advantages of money, we can show them that we have no idea of grieving over its loss. One of my greatest regrets is that in future we shall be somewhat stinted in our means of helping our neighbours."

The next day, accordingly, the rector, his wife, and daughters drove over to the skating party, and although a few knew how great was the change effected in their circumstances by the crash at the bank, the majority believed that the report that the greater part, if not the whole, of the rector's private property had been swept away, had been grossly exaggerated, for there was nothing in their manner or appearance to afford any indication of their changed position. Yorke said that he would rather stay at home, and, when the others started, went to the stables, and patted and talked to the horses. He had ridden all of them; for, three years before, he had been promoted from his pony, and in his holidays took long rides with his father. He had learned also to take the horses over hurdles erected in the field behind the house, and, under the instruction of his father's coachman, who had once been a stud groom, had acquired an excellent seat.

"And what are you going to do, Master Yorke?" the man asked, for he had already heard from Mr. Harberton that circumstances had occurred that would oblige him to give up his carriage and horses, but that he would try to find him another situation.

"I am not going back to school, that is quite settled. Of course it is a beastly nuisance, but it can't be helped. My father says that he intends to teach me himself; but, what with parish work, and one thing and another, I know it would be a very tiresome job for him. But even if he did, I don't see that it would be of any great use to me. Of course I cannot go up to the University now; I am not altogether sorry for that, for, you know, my father always wished me to go into the church, and although, so far, I have said nothing against it, I don't feel that I am in any way cut out for the job. Anyhow, I don't like the thought of being a drag on his hands, for after I had done with work with him there would be a terrible difficulty about getting me a berth of some kind.

"I would rather do anything in the world than be a clerk and be stuck in an office all day. That is the worst of going to a public school, you get to hate the idea of an indoor life. I would rather a hundred times go to sea or enlist in the army, when I am old enough; at any rate in the army I should see something of the world and keep myself, and at the end of my five years' service might find some opening. Then there is my father's cousin out at the Cape. When he was here last year, I know he offered to take me out with him. Of course father would not hear of it then, there was no reason why he should; but things have changed, and I don't see why I should not go now. I am getting on for sixteen, you know, and can ride and all that sort of thing, and I shot regularly last winter, and brought down some partridges too."

"Not many, master," the man said with a grin.

"No, not many," the boy admitted; "still, it was my first year, and I had only a single barrel; father himself said I did very fairly, and that he had no doubt that I should make a good shot in time."

"I have no doubt that you would, Master Yorke," the man said heartily. "You have learned to ride well, and a man with a good seat on a horse is generally good behind a gun."

Yorke Harberton was, as he said, nearly sixteen, and

was a typical public-school boy—straight and clean-limbed, free from all awkwardness, bright in expression, and possessed of a large amount of self-possession, or, as he himself would have called it, "cheek"; was a little particular about the set of his Eton jacket and trousers and the appearance of his boots; as hard as nails and almost tireless; a good specimen of the class by which Britain has been built up, her colonies formed, and her battle-fields won—a class in point of energy, fearlessness, the spirit of adventure, and a readiness to face and overcome all difficulties, unmatched in the world. His thoughts were turned into a fresh channel by his conversation with William, and he strolled away with his hands deep in his pockets and his mind busy.

"Well, Yorke, what have you been doing with yourself?" was his father's first question when he returned.

"I don't know that I have been doing anything, father."

"Which does not mean that you have been in mischief, I hope?"

"No," the boy laughed, "I haven't. I went to the stables first, and since then I have been walking about the garden."

"That is quite a new amusement, Yorke, especially in winter," one of his sisters said in a tone of astonishment. "Fancy you walking round and round the garden! Wonders will never cease!"

"Well, it is quite as sensible, anyhow, Lucy, as tearing about the grass playing lawn-tennis on a hot summer's day."

Like most boys of that age, Yorke, though very fond of his sisters, regarded them as mere girls, and especially objected to being in any way, as he considered, patronized by them.

"But you know, my dear," his mother said gently, "it is not often you do walk about the garden by yourself, so it was natural that Lucy should be surprised."

"Quite natural, mother," Yorke admitted frankly. "Well, I have been thinking over something."

"And what conclusion have you arrived at, Yorke?" his father asked.

The boy hesitated. "I will tell you after breakfast to-morrow," he said, "it is too long to talk about now." Then he asked questions about the afternoon they had spent, and the subject was not alluded to before him until the next morning, although he was the chief topic of conversation between his father and mother that night.

"The boy has something in his head," Mr. Harberton said. "There can be no doubt that this very unfortunate business affects him more seriously than the rest of us. To us it means a quieter life, less gaiety, and a little pinching; to him it means a great deal more—it is a change in his whole prospects, a change in his career. I think that would have come anyhow; Yorke has never said that he disliked the thought of going into the church, but the mere fact that it was a topic he always avoided is quite sufficient to show that his heart was not in it. I should in no case have exercised any strong influence in the matter, for unless a man feels he has a call to the vocation it is better that he should not enter it. Now I should be still more unwilling to put any pressure whatever upon him. Certainly I shall not be able to afford to send him to college, unless he could gain an open scholarship that would go far towards paying his expenses. But of that I see no prospect whatever.

"Yorke is no fool, but he has no great application, and his school reports show that, although not at the bottom of his form, he is never more than half-way up. If viewed merely as a worldly profession, the church is now the worst that a young man can enter. The value of the livings has long been falling off, owing to the drop in value of tithes and land. The number of curates is immensely larger than that of livings, and the chance of preferment, unless through powerful patronage, is but slight. In other professions a man's value is in proportion to his age. In the church it is otherwise. No incumbent likes having a curate older than himself, and a man of fifty will obtain less pay than one of five-and-twenty; and I see no prospect whatever of

any improvement. While some classes have become more wealthy, the landed gentry, who may be considered the best supporters of the church, have become poorer, owing in part to the fall in the value of land, and to the very heavy death and succession duties. It would need much national effort to make any real improvement in our condition, and I see no hope of such a national effort being made. I should not be greatly surprised if, as a result of his cogitations to-day, Yorke tells me to-morrow that he has made up his mind to give up all idea of entering the church."

"I should be sorry," Mrs. Harberton said almost tearfully; "I have so looked forward to it."

"I doubt whether he would have gone in any circumstances," her husband said, "and I certainly should not have urged him to do so had he expressed any reluctance. It is in my opinion the highest and noblest career that man can adopt, but it must be only taken up with the highest motives. Yorke is a good lad, but neither studious nor serious in his disposition. Possibly, had I kept him at home and had a tutor for him, he would willingly have fallen in with our hopes and wishes; but it was on that very account that I sent him to a public school. There is nothing more unfortunate than that a man should too late discover that he has mistaken his avocation. As it is, his decision, if it is his decision, has been quickened by this crash. The path to the church is no longer easy for him, and I fancy that while we were away to-day he has been laying his own plans for the future."

"He is so young to have any plans at all, John."

"He is nearly sixteen," the rector said decidedly, "and a public-school boy of that age has learned to think more for himself, and to be more independent, than one two years older who has always been kept at home, or perhaps educated with two or three others by a clergyman. I have always taught him to be self-reliant, have let him ride my horses, and generally act on his own devices. As long as I was in

a position to maintain and advance him in any career he might choose, I had a right to a very considerable influence over him. I still retain the right to advise and to warn; but I should no longer oppose his wishes, providing that these were not altogether impracticable."

"You would not let him go to sea, surely?" his wife said. "All boys seem to want to go to sea."

"I should certainly be sorry if he set his mind on that. He is too old for the Royal Navy, but I could afford to pay the usual premium required for his entry as an apprentice, as it is called, in a good firm of ship-owners. I should be sorry, because we should see him so seldom; otherwise, personally, I have no objection to the life. I had a younger brother in the merchant service. He died a few months before I married you. But his death had nothing to do with the sea service; he liked it very much, and never regretted having entered it. However, we can wait till we know what Yorke says in the morning."

When breakfast was over, the rector said: "Now, Yorke, come into my study and we will have a grand council. Now, sit down comfortably," he went on, "and tell me exactly what you have been thinking of. It is only natural that you should have considered seriously the changes that this unfortunate affair has necessitated, and as you have plenty of common sense, we will gladly hear your views about it."

"It is evident that I cannot go back to Rugby, father."

"I fear that is the case, Yorke. I don't see how it could be done. I shall have but a very small balance left after paying the calls that will be made upon me, and I must set apart a portion of my income to insure my life for the benefit of your mother and sisters, in case I should be called away. At the same time that need not necessarily deter you from carrying out your plan of entering the church. I took a second class at Oxford, and could work with you at home and push you forward, and I have no doubt that our bishop would ordain you when the time arrived."

"Thank you, father!" Yorke said quietly, "but the more I think of it the less willing I am to enter the church. I don't think that I am fit for it, and I am sure that I should never make a good clergyman. I cannot fancy myself working for years, perhaps, among the poor in some manufacturing town. I meant to tell you so before long in any case. I am sorry, because I know that you and the mater have always wished it."

"That is so, but I should not press you, Yorke," his father said. "In the church, above all other careers, a worker must be a willing worker, and his heart must be in it. If it is not, he is far better out of it. You have not surprised me at all. And now let us consider that settled. I suppose you have been thinking of something else?"

"I have been thinking of all sorts of things, father. I thought about going to sea, but I am not sure that I should like it. Besides, I want to get on; I want to be a help instead of a burden—not, of course, at first, but in something where there is a chance of making one's way, and in case—in case—You know what I mean, father?—I might be able to provide a home for the mater and the girls."

"Quite right, Yorke!" his father said encouragingly. "Of course you are very young yet, and I am, so far as I know, a strong and healthy man. Still, life is always uncertain, and even if I am spared for many years, it is hardly likely that I shall be able to make any great provision for them. Certainly, I shall not be able to afford to insure my life for any adequate sum for their comfortable maintenance. I shall do my best. Still, I am in hopes that in the meanwhile your sisters will be married and provided for. Well, what were you thinking of, Yorke?"

"I was thinking that as my cousin, Herbert Allnutt, offered last year to take me back to the Cape with him for a year or two, it would be a good thing to go out there. If I were to stay with him for a couple of years, I should have got to know the country. You see, as he has been out there for

so long, he must have lots of friends, and he would be able to give me plenty of introductions. He is near the railway from Cape Town, and he must know people up in the mining district, so I might get a good berth through him. What sort of post, of course, I cannot guess; but from what one hears, a young fellow who is steady, and so on, is sure to make his way. Of course I should never think of settling down to farming, as he has done, but there must be plenty of other openings. Out there, at any rate, I shall be able to earn my own living to start with, which is more than I could do here, and I would a thousand times rather lead that sort of life than take a place as a clerk."

Mr. Harberton was silent for a minute or two.

"The greatest objection I see to it," he said at last, "is that the state of things there is very unsettled. Ever since the Jameson raid, matters seem to have been getting worse. That expedition was a very unfortunate one. It was ill-advised and premature, but it was the outcome of great wrong. There is no doubt that the Europeans in the Transvaal are abominably treated by the Boers. Still, now that Chamberlain has taken up the matter, something must be done, and no doubt when the white colonists are placed on the same footing as the Boers, matters in the Transvaal will be greatly improved. Your cousin was saying that there are gold-fields yet untouched, because the amount of extortion on the part of the Boer people, the necessity for large bribes, the tremendous taxation, and the cost of powder and other matters, which are the subject of monopolies, are so great, that all fresh industries are stopped, and the existing ones crippled. When these are abolished, as they must be sooner or later, there will be an immense impetus to business.

"It may be two or three years before matters are placed upon a proper footing, and by the time you are old enough to avail yourself of such chances, things may have settled down, and there will be a rush of immigration. I do not know much about these matters, but I believe that steady

and energetic young men, acquainted with the country, will have great opportunities. From what your cousin said, the Boers have for years been quietly building fortifications and collecting arms; but I can hardly think they will be mad enough to defy the demands of England for the fair treatment of the class they call Uitlanders, especially as the latter were guaranteed all rights of equality by the last treaty. Well, I will think it over, Yorke. It is quite a new idea to me, but at the first blush I am not inclined to reject it. There can be no doubt that a young fellow, fairly well educated, energetic, and above all, steady and well-conducted, has a far greater chance of making his way in South Africa than he would have in older, or at least more established, colonies. It would be a great advantage to you to have two or three years' experience there before you set out for yourself, and the benefit of Allnutt's introductions would, no doubt, be considerable."

A week passed before the subject was resumed. Yorke felt almost like a culprit. His mother and sisters had evidently been told about his project, and went about the house with faces far more gloomy than those they had shown when they first heard of the bank failure. Yorke felt that the girls, at any rate, highly disapproved of his plan, and kept out of their way as much as possible. At last he was called again into the study, and on this occasion his mother was also present.

"We have talked this matter over very seriously, Yorke," his father began, "and although at first your mother was very much against the idea, she has come to see that it is probably the best that could be done under the circumstances. She acknowledges that she would be less anxious about you than if you were at sea. She sees, also, that with your somewhat restless disposition, and the ideas with which you have been brought up, you would really never be happy in a London office, even if we could obtain a berth there for you. In that way I have no influence whatever; besides, you are two or

three years too young for it. We have therefore agreed, that, at any rate for that time, you could not do better than be acquiring experience in South Africa. By the time you are eighteen you will be better able to estimate your chance of getting on there.

"You will then have acquired a knowledge of the world, so that, should you decide to come home, no harm will have been done, for you will not be too old to make a fresh start in some other direction. I am sure your cousin will be glad to see you, his invitation was a very hearty one. I hope you may remain with him for some time; but should you not do so, I have no doubt he will make comfortable arrangements for you elsewhere. I say this because I am sure, that though personally he would in all ways do his best to make you happy, I do not think he is a very strong man, and I fancy, from words that he let drop, that his wife is the head of the partnership. She is a Dutch woman, and her family are, as he told me, among the leaders of what is called the Africander party. What their wishes and intentions may be I really don't know, for I have scarcely given a thought to the matter, and seldom read the Cape news. However, I know that they hold that the Dutch party ought to be predominant at the Cape. However, this need not affect you, and certainly you could have no occasion to take any interest in the politics of the Cape for some years to come.

"Well, my boy, it is a very grave step to take; but I own that it does appear to me the best that is open to you, and should it turn out otherwise, you will have plenty of time to remedy it. I shall pay fifty pounds into a bank at the Cape in your name, so that if at any time you decide that you have made a mistake, you can take your passage home again, and you will certainly be none the worse for having spent a year or two out there."

"Thank you both heartily, father! I hope I sha'n't come back like a bad penny. I feel sure that the life will just suit me; and when I have once learned to make myself useful on

a farm I shall have no difficulty in getting employment elsewhere, if, as I hope will not be the case, I do not get on well with Mr. Allnutt's wife."

"Your father says the climate is very good, Yorke," Mrs. Harberton said tearfully. "It seems to me a terrible thing for a boy like you to go out there alone; but going to a relation is not like going among strangers, and I know you liked Mr. Allnutt when he was here."

"Yes, I thought him very jolly, and I am sure I shall get on capitally with him. Of course I had no fancy for going out when he spoke to me, because things were different; but I thought of it at once when I began to wonder what would be the best thing for me to do."

"I should have liked you to stay at home for a time, Yorke," his mother said, with a quiver in her voice, "but your father is of opinion that as you are to go, the sooner you go the better."

"I think so, Mother. The horses will be sold next week, and I should only be idling about the house and doing no good; and it would be just as painful saying good-bye three months hence as it is now."

"Yes, and we should be looking forward to it all the time. Besides, we want you to see if you like the business, and whether you think that you will be able to get on; and if you don't, we want you back again in time for anything that may turn up. Therefore, in all respects, the sooner you go the better. I don't suppose there will be much trouble about your outfit. You will want two or three suits of rough, strong material, coats made like shooting-jackets, with big pockets, also flannel shirts, and a good supply of stout boots and strong stockings coming up to the knees. You had better have your trousers made knickerbocker fashion, and get a couple of pairs of soft leather gaiters.

"I will get you a double-barrel small-bore gun, they are coming into fashion now; and though I would rather have a twelve-bore, they say the smaller ones make very good shoot-

ing, and they are a good deal lighter to carry. It will be time enough for you to think of getting a rifle in a couple of years, if you decide to stay there. Besides, as everyone seems to use rifles out there, and no doubt you will practise at a mark—Mr. Allnutt will lend you one. We will drive over to Yeovil this afternoon and get you measured for the clothes. Mother will go with us to see about the shirts, and so on. To-morrow I will write to Donald Currie's people and secure a second-class berth for you. The more occupied we are the less time there will be for fretting. I shall lose no time in writing to your head-master stating why I am obliged to take you away. I dare say you will have letters to write to your chums."

From that moment all was busy. In spite of the assurances that the Cape was a warm climate, the girls applied themselves to knitting comforters and mittens. There was a general overhauling of Yorke's clothes, as white shirts and English clothes would probably be required on Sundays.

"We shall not get you any more things of this sort," his father said. "It is of no use your carrying about more clothes than you want, and it is likely that you will outgrow those you have before you wear them out. I shall give you a letter to post to Mr. Allnutt as soon as you land, and then you can stop two days at Cape Town before starting, and won't come upon him altogether by surprise. I hope you will get on well with his wife—there is no fear of your getting a hearty welcome from him—but I shall tell him that if, after you have been with him a short time, he finds that his wife is not pleased with the arrangement, as his cordial invitation was given without consultation with her, he should take you to some nice people—English, of course—where the work you might do in the first place would be considered an equivalent for your board—for, naturally, whether you stay with him or anyone else, you will have to work."

"Certainly, father; that is what I am going out for. If I wasn't to work, I might as well stop here and idle my time away as at the Cape. I suppose one of the first things

to do will be to learn Dutch and something of the native language, for although in farming one might be able to get on well without it, one would certainly want it if one were going into any business in the mining regions. I will get a Dutch grammar if I can before I start, and learn as many words as I can on the voyage."

"It might be very well worth your while, Yorke. I believe that the language spoken is a sort of dialect they call *taal*. Still, it is founded upon Dutch, and anything that you can learn of it would help you."

"Well, I shall make a point of working hard at it, father. My own idea is to go up to Kimberley or Johannesburg, when I have been out a couple of years, with an introduction from Mr. Allnutt to some store-keeper or manager of mines there, and then work my way up. Of course I don't expect to make much money for a time, but I shall certainly lay by every penny I earn over and above keeping myself."

"Whatever you do, don't be too sanguine, because if you do you will assuredly meet with severe disappointment."

"I don't mean to, Father; once I get into a thing that seems likely to turn out well, I will stick to it patiently. There is one comfort—I have read that out in the colonies men do not care what they turn their hands to; no one thinks the worse of a young man for doing any honest job, so that he keeps himself straight. I mean to keep myself straight. I am determined that I will never touch liquor of any kind unless I am ill, or under extraordinary circumstances."

"You could not make a better resolution, Yorke. I believe that in the colonies, even more than here, drink is the bane of too many young men, and it is certainly an obstacle to success with all. I know your cousin, when he was here, said nineteen out of twenty of the young fellows who go to the bad, after arriving full of hope and energy, owe their downfall solely to drink. The life at the back stations is lonely, there is an entire absence of amusement, and it is especially dull of an evening. The temptation, therefore, to take drink to cheer

up the spirits is strong, and when he has once yielded to it a man is almost sure to go from bad to worse. 'In my experience,' he said, 'I have known of no instance where a young man who resisted all temptations to drink was a complete failure. He may suffer very heavily from droughts, and have misfortunes over which he has no control, but he can keep his head afloat and so do fairly well in the end.' The native spirit, that is to say, the Boer spirit—Cape smoke it is called—is vile, and is simply liquid poison. However, the Dutch are not a drunken set, and do not very often drink to excess; perhaps the very badness of the liquor keeps them from it. That being the case, Yorke, it is evident that you cannot be too careful, and it would be a comfort both to your mother and me to know that you have set out with a stern resolution to avoid liquor—except, of course, in case of illness or in exceptional circumstances, such as a long journey in a pouring rain, when a small amount of spirits may prevent bad consequences. But Mr. Allnutt said that even then it was more effective if you stripped, poured some of it into your hand, and thoroughly rubbed yourself with it."

"That is a good idea, father, and I will try it under such circumstances."

A week later, after a tearful parting from his mother and sisters, Yorke went up to town accompanied by his father, who took him on board one of the Castle Line steamers, and remained with him until she went out of dock. The voyage was altogether uneventful. There were several young fellows, sons of gentlemen, going out in the second class. Yorke was three or four years younger than any of them, but they all took to him, and he had a pleasant time. For three or four hours a day he worked steadily at Dutch, and received a good deal of assistance in the pronunciation from a Dutch gentleman returning home from a visit, who took an interest in the boy who so steadily sat apart from the rest and studied his language. Yorke also made the acquaintance of several of the third-class passengers, miners, carpenters, and

other workers, who had been back to the old country to see their friends, and from them he learned a good deal more of the colony than he had hitherto known.

"I don't say that it is not necessary to learn Dutch," one of them said in answer to a question, "if you are going into a store or mean to farm, but in the towns it is not much needed, for we and the Dutch don't have much to do with each other. Very few of them are engaged at the mines or even in the stores. They treat us as dirt under their feet. But the general idea is that it won't be very long before there is a change. England is a long while making up her mind to see us righted, but she will do so some day. When she does, she will find it a tougher job than she expects. For the past four or five years they have been importing arms and ammunition of every sort. No one can understand out there why England does not put a stop to it. She will certainly pay heavily for it in the future. The Boers have an idea that we cannot fight. That is a big mistake, you know, but with such a great country, with hills—big hills, too—and passes, and that sort of thing, the Boers, who are mostly good shots, will be able to make a desperate resistance, even if it is only the Transvaal. But there is a general idea that the Orange Free State will join them, and in that case it will be a big job, especially as there are Dutch all over Cape Colony, who likely enough will rise also. People in England do not seem to have an idea what a big place South Africa is. Why, it is as big as England and Scotland and Ireland and France all thrown together, and you can count your miles by the thousand instead of the hundred. All these fellows, too, have horses, any number of them, and men marching on foot would not have a ghost of a chance of catching them. I tell you it will be a big business if it ever begins."

CHAPTER II

ON A DUTCH FARM

THE voyage had passed so pleasantly that Yorke was quite sorry when it was over. The acquaintances he had made were all going up-country, a few to farms where they had friends, but the greater part to Kimberley or Johannesburg, where they thought they would be sure to find something to turn their hands to. Three or four were going on to Durban, having friends or relatives in Natal. On landing, Yorke was almost bewildered by the crowd of laughing, shouting men, for the most part blacks, though there were many whose red fezzes showed them to be Mohammedans, mostly Malays. All of these were offering to carry luggage, or recommending rival hotels or boarding-houses. Fortunately Yorke had arranged with one of his friends to go to the same hotel. Pushing their way through the throng, they hired a vehicle somewhat resembling a hansom in appearance, and bearing in large letters its name, "Old England", and were driven to the hotel which one of the ship's officers had recommended to them.

"There is no mistake about our being abroad, Harberton," Howard, Yorke's companion, laughed. "What a mixed crowd, Kaffirs and Malays, whity-brown mixtures, Dutchmen and British! But even without them, the vehicles are as un-English as possible. They are certainly ahead of us in the way of traction-engines; that fellow dragging two waggons behind it is the third we have seen. The tram-cars are more like ours, but the row they keep up with those gongs is enough to frighten any well-conducted horse. Look at that funny two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a pair of horses. I suppose it is what they call a Cape cart; you see it has a hood. I don't think I ever saw a two-wheeled trap with the horses before. Evidently Dutch is the language here, for

even the Kaffirs and Malays jabber in it. I rather wish now that I had followed your example, Harberton, and tried to learn enough to make a start with. It makes you feel like an ass if you can't ask for the simplest thing and get understood in a country under your own flag."

After reaching the hotel, Yorke made enquiries of an English clerk as to the hour at which the trains for Kimberley left. He found there were only two a day, and that the morning one arrived at Brakpoort Station, his destination, a distance of some four hundred miles from Cape Town, at twelve o'clock on the following day. The letter to Mr. Allnutt had been left open, so that he could give that gentleman some idea of when he might be expected. The clerk told him that Brakpoort was a comparatively small place, but that he would have no difficulty in hiring a cart there to drive him out to the farm, which lay eighteen miles west, being about midway between the station and the town of Richmond. Yorke now added a line or two indicating the time at which he would arrive at Brakpoort, closed the letter, and went out and posted it.

After having done this he walked about for a time. The town impressed him favourably. Some of the old Dutch houses still remained, but their appearance was scarcely picturesque. Their fronts were of almost unbroken flatness, and distinguished only by their superabundance of windows. The shops were excellent, and far superior to those of Yeovil. The articles were all European, and he looked in vain for anything that had the appearance of native manufacture. If he had found any small distinctive articles he would have bought them to send home to his mother and sisters. Howard, who was going up to Kimberley, told him that evening that, instead of starting, as he had intended to do, on the following morning, he would wait another day.

"It will be pleasanter for us both," he said. "It is slow work travelling with half a dozen fellows whose language one does not understand, and I know the Boers are not

inclined to be civil. While you were out, I was chatting to a man who had just come down from Pretoria, and he says that everything there looked very gloomy. Of course our people have had their hopes raised owing to the fact that their case has been taken up at last by the home authorities. They are convinced that Kruger, who, by all accounts, is one of the most obstinate and conceited old brutes that ever lived, will never give way an inch, and that, in fact, he will fight rather than do so. Indeed, they believe that he is bent on forcing on a war; and the Boers say openly that in another year the Rooineks will have to go—Rooineks means English. So it will be much more pleasant for us to travel together. I heard you just now trying to talk to that coffee-coloured servant, and I saw that you were able to make him understand a little, so if we want to ask any questions about stopping-places, and so on, you will be useful."

"Dutch seems hard when you first look at it," Yorke said, "but you soon see that most of the words are really very like English, though they are spelt differently. One of my books is a sort of conversation book, with questions and answers on useful subjects, such as you are likely to meet with when you are travelling, when you are at a hotel, and so on. Of course they put a 'J' where we put an 'I', and it puzzles one at first, but I think that in a month or two I shall begin to get on fairly well with it."

"Well, if what they say is true, we shall have a lively time of it before long; but though they brag a great deal, I can hardly believe they will be mad enough to go to war with us. If they do, it will put a stop to business for a time, and, as Kimberley is close to the frontier, we shall bear the brunt of it."

They started by the train arranged, carrying with them a basket of provisions for the journey, having been warned that this was absolutely necessary, as, except at one or two of the stations, there was nothing whatever to be had. In the old waggon days, their informant had told them, every traveller

had to provide himself for the whole journey, and the custom had become so general, that it would hardly pay speculators to set up refreshment places except at the principal stations. Even these could only rely upon the custom of Europeans, as the Boers are far too parsimonious to think of buying provisions when they can carry their own with them.

They went to the station early so as to secure corner seats. The carriage filled up at starting, but several left at the stations nearest to the town, and after travelling for a couple of hours, only four remained in the carriage besides themselves. These were all Dutch. They carried on a very animated conversation among themselves.

"I think it is just as well that we don't understand them," Yorke said quietly. "I can only catch a few words here and there, but I am sure they are running us down. I don't mean us, but the English in general."

"Then it is quite as well we don't understand them, for I certainly should not sit quiet and hear them abusing us; and as there are four of them, all big fellows, a quarrel might have very disagreeable consequences. I was warned down at Cape Town that if I wished to live in peace and quiet I must keep in with these fellows; and if it is bad here, it must be a great deal worse for our people up in the Transvaal."

The journey was for the most part uninteresting; but there was some superb scenery at the Flex River, and through a series of grand slopes where the line crosses a mountain range. Sometimes the country was hilly, but it was bare of trees; farmhouses were sparsely scattered about; the vegetation was all parched up, for it was now the middle of summer, and no rain had fallen for a considerable time.

"Unless the cattle have learnt to eat sand," Yorke said with a laugh, "I don't know how they can exist; and yet the land seemed rich enough for the first part of the journey."

"I believe it is very rich where it is cultivated, and either wells are sunk, or dams constructed in narrow valleys or dips to catch the water. I believe the vineyards and orchards lying

in the districts north of the Cape are extremely rich, but as a rule the Boer farmers are too ignorant to make improvements. They are cattle-raisers rather than farmers. The British settlers are, for the most part, men of insufficient capital. Some day, no doubt, when the country is more thickly settled, and there are better markets, there will be a very different state of things. I have no doubt that artesian wells would furnish an abundant supply of water in most places, and with them and irrigation and the planting of trees, it will be a splendid country. Where there are plenty of trees, the rainfall always increases; and what is of almost equal importance, the ground round them retains the moisture, instead of the rain rushing off and being carried down in torrents before it has had time to do much good. However, I have no idea of farming; but I am sure that anyone with capital coming out, and planting a few hundred acres of trees near Kimberley, would make a bigger fortune than by investing in mines."

"He would have to wait a long time for his money," Yorke said.

"Yes, but he could raise vegetables between the young trees; and my uncle, whom I am going to, says that vegetables fetch a tremendous price at Kimberley."

After a weary journey of twenty-eight hours they arrived at Brakpoort.

"Here you are, Harberton!"

"Well, I hope we shall meet again. I am sure to come up to Kimberley, sooner or later."

"If you do, don't forget that I have given you my uncle's address, and you are sure to find me there, or, at any rate, to find out where I am."

It was but a small wayside station, and Yorke felt somewhat desolate after he had shaken hands with his friend and got out with his portmanteau and bag. The feeling was speedily dispelled, for hurrying towards him he saw Mr. Allnutt.

"How are you, Yorke, my boy?" his cousin said, as he grasped his hand. "I am glad to see you, though I am sorry to hear of the cause that has sent you out here. I only received your letter this morning. Luckily I had sent a Kaffir over yesterday for a parcel. I started ten minutes after I got it, and only arrived here a quarter of an hour ago. I thought that you might have some difficulty in getting a cart to carry you so far. We shall have to wait two hours to give the horses a rest, for I have driven fast, and the road—I don't suppose you would call it a road—is very heavy."

"It is very kind of you to come over to meet me," Yorke said, much affected with the heartiness of the reception. "I should certainly be very glad of a drink, for it was so terribly hot yesterday and this morning, that, though we thought we had laid in a good supply of water, we finished it all at our first meal this morning."

"Well, we shall get a very fair lunch at this store here. These stations are used, you see, by people for many miles round. Your father tells me that you are all well at home, but, I suppose, greatly upset at this bad business."

"No. Of course it will make a lot of difference to us, but I think they troubled more about my coming away than they did about the loss of the money."

"Well, lad, a year or two of our rough life will do you good, and they won't know you when you go back to them."

"Is Mrs. Allnutt quite well, sir?"

"Yes," the colonist said, "she is very well, Yorke; she always is well." But the lad detected a change in the tone in which he spoke.

"I hope it wasn't a disagreeable surprise to her, sir, my coming so suddenly upon you?"

"No, it was not. She was surprised, of course, but I am sure that she will make you comfortable. My wife is a good woman, a very good woman; but, you see, she is Dutch, and she does not take to new ideas suddenly. I have no doubt

she will be just as pleased as I am at your coming, when she gets to know you, and will feel that, having no children of our own, you will be a great acquisition, and brighten us up very much. There is one thing I must warn you about: she is prejudiced, I must admit that. You see, almost all the people round us are Dutch, and of late there has been what I may call a nasty feeling among them. There is an association called the Africander Bond, and its object, as far as I can see, is to establish the supremacy of the Dutch in Africa. It is doing a lot of harm. Until a short time back, the English and Dutch got on very well together, and as far as supremacy goes, the greater part of the members of the assembly were Dutch, and almost all the officials. We did not mind that. No doubt the colony would have gone ahead a good deal faster if our people had had more voice in affairs, for it cannot be denied that the Dutch hate changes of any kind, and would like the world to stand still. A Dutchman would still rather travel in his lumbering waggon, and take a week over it, than make a railway journey of a few hours. That gives you a fair sample of their dislike to change. Of course I am accustomed to these things, and keep quiet when my neighbours come in and set to work talking over affairs, and discussing the possibility of a great Dutch Republic over the whole of South Africa. It does not worry me. I know well enough that England will never let them have it; but I don't tell them so. I like peace and quiet, and I say nothing; and you must say nothing, Yorke. That is the one thing that I have to impress upon you. Never argue with my wife on that subject. She is a good woman, but, naturally enough, being Dutch, she thinks as her countrymen do. That is the one rock ahead; if you steer clear of that, we shall get on capitally."

By this time they were seated in a large room at the store eating their lunch, while a Kaffir boy was squatting near the four horses, which were munching mealies. Mr. Allnutt had come out a young man to the Cape thirty years before. He

was of an easy disposition, and did not succeed; he was therefore glad to obtain employment on the farm of a large Dutch farmer. The latter had an only child, a daughter of sixteen years old, who, before the good-looking young Englishman had been there many months, fell in love with him, and announced to her father her intention of marrying him. The old man raved and stormed, shut her up for a time, and even threatened to beat her. Finding that she was still obstinate, he sent her for two years to a school in Cape Town. This had no effect whatever. She returned with very enlarged ideas as to the decencies of living, and wanted, as he said, to turn the house upside down. Finding it impossible to bend her to his will, he gave in. She had kept up a correspondence with Allnutt, who had, of course, been discharged as soon as the farmer had discovered his daughter's fancy for him.

He had not been insensible to the advantages of the position. Her father owned large numbers of cattle and horses, and an extensive tract of land watered by a stream that, except at very dry seasons, was always full. He had been working at a farm near Colesberg, and on the receipt of a letter from her announcing that her father was willing to sanction the match he at once returned and married her. A year later her father died, to Allnutt's great relief, and his wife at once set to work to transmogrify the interior of the house, and to equip it in the fashion which she had learned to value at the Cape.

The great stove which had before been in use was removed and replaced by an open fire, and the room fitted with carpets and English furniture. The upstairs rooms were similarly altered and furnished, curtains were hung at all the windows, and though outside the house retained the appearance of an ordinary Boer homestead, the interior had the appearance of the house of a well-to-do British colonist. Once a year Mrs. Allnutt and her husband had gone down to Cape Town, and remained there for a month; this had kept her in touch with civilization. Out-of-doors the farm was managed

entirely by her husband, but inside the house she was absolute mistress.

After giving the horses an hour's rest, Mr. Allnutt and Yorke started in a Cape cart, the Kaffir taking the reins, while they sat on the seat behind him. Mr. Allnutt chatted pleasantly as they drove, and although the road crossed the veldt, it was not uninteresting.

Yorke was surprised when the farmer pointed to a house on a low nek between two hills and said, "That is my place, Yorke. It is two miles away yet, but I am on my own ground now. Roughly, the farm contains nearly six square miles of level ground and two of hill; it is worth a good deal more than when I took it. I saw that if it had water it would support three times as many cattle as there were on it, and I dammed the stream up in the hills and brought water down, and have irrigated three or four hundred acres. It took a lot of work, but Kaffir labour is cheap. I cut the grass twice and make hay of it; six months in the year I let the cattle feed on it, and it has fully answered my expectations, and every year repays me all the expense of carrying the job out. The Dutch farmers around come here and admire, and envy the green pasture when their own is burnt up, but though they see the advantage well enough, there is not one of them has attempted to imitate it."

"It must have been a big job fencing it in," Yorke said.

"Yes; I could not do that the first year, but the aloes and prickly-pear of which it is made grow very quickly. The farm itself is enclosed by barbed-wire fencing. The law obliges every settler to fence his land."

As they drove up to the door Mrs. Allnutt came out. Her two years at Cape Town and her subsequent visits there had prevented her from falling into the loose and slovenly way of the ordinary Boer farmer's wife. She was a large woman and somewhat stout, but her dress was neat and well-fitting. She had a strong but not unpleasant face, and welcomed Yorke with more geniality than he had expected.

"You are welcome," she said. "It is a long journey for you to have made alone. Were you sent out here, or did you come at your own wish?"

"It was my own proposal," Yorke replied. "I could not remain idle at home, and I was too young to go into any business there. I am fond of outdoor exercise, and as Mr. Allnutt, when in England, had kindly invited me to come over, I thought it would be best for me to accept his offer, and to learn something of the country and its ways before I made a start for myself."

"You were quite right," she said. "Certainly a stay here for a time will do that for you. But come in. Of course you will find our ways a little strange at first, but you look sensible, and I have no doubt you will soon feel at home."

After what Yorke had heard of the mode of life of the Dutch farmer, he was surprised to find, when he entered the house, an air of English comfort pervading it. The room prepared for him was such as he would meet with in the house of a well-to-do farmer in England; the furniture was good and substantial, muslin curtains hung at the windows. Looking out, he saw that the whole back of the house was covered with roses in full bloom, and that there was a small but pretty garden behind; round this was a large orchard—apple, pear, peach, and other fruit trees. He had seen nothing like this in any of the farmhouses they had passed on the road. On returning down-stairs, after indulging in a good wash, he expressed his thanks to Mrs. Allnutt for the comfort of his bedroom, and his admiration for the gorgeous show of roses in the garden.

"Yes," she said, "I saw the gardens of many of the English mansions round Cape Town, and I made up my mind to have something like them here. My neighbours at first all thought it a terrible waste of labour, but I do not as a rule care much for other folks' opinions; and though I do not pretend to like your people, I do not see why we should not adopt their customs when we see that they are better than our

own—especially when so many of our people living near Cape Town have taken to them."

"Everything looks very nice and comfortable, Mrs. Allnutt, and if I had not looked out of the window I should not have known that I was not at home."

"Can you ride?" she asked abruptly; for although her residence at Cape Town had taught her to appreciate the modes of life there, she did not like being thought, even in such a matter, to copy the British, and chose to consider that they were those of the better class of her own people—as, indeed, was the case.

"Yes, I can ride," Yorke said. "I am very fond of it."

"Can you shoot?"

"I have begun," he said. "You see, I have been at school, and it is only during the winter holidays that I have had any chance, and just the last fortnight of the long holiday in summer."

"But how is that?" she asked. "Why do you not shoot all the year round?"

"Because it is a close time up to the 1st of September, and there is not much shooting after January; people begin to hunt about that time."

"Yes, game is protected here also."

Yorke had told his cousin that he had begun to learn Dutch, and was very anxious to get to speak the language well, and on the latter telling his wife, she nodded approvingly.

"You will have plenty of opportunities, for Dutch is the language of the house. Sometimes I speak in English with my husband, because I wish to keep it up, but he speaks Dutch as well as I do. But as the Kaffirs speak our language, and do not understand English, it is much more convenient to speak that language. You had better get Hans," she went on, turning to her husband, "to go about with him; in that way he will soon learn to speak Taal. He is very little use to me about the house; he is very lazy, and if it wasn't for his father having been killed on the place, I would not keep him a day."

Hans had taken the horses when the cart drew up. He was a rough, slouching lad of about Yorke's age, loosely built, and altogether unkempt and slovenly; his father, who had been Mr. Allnutt's head cattleman, had been thrown from his horse and pitched on to his head, breaking his neck instantly. Hans Smidt, who was ten years old at the time, having no relations, had been taken on at the house, and was supposed to aid in looking after the horses there, watering the garden, and doing odd jobs. He was now receiving the same wages as the Kaffir labourers, although, as Mrs. Allnutt declared, a Kaffir boy was worth a dozen of him.

For the next few days Yorke rode about the farm with his cousin, inspecting the herds and getting a general idea of the place.

"You will save me a good deal of trouble, Yorke," his cousin, who objected to trouble of any kind, said. "You can ride down twice a day and see that the Kaffirs are doing their work and preventing the cattle from straying too far away. Beyond that you can amuse yourself as you like. There are a dozen young horses which want breaking in. I see you have a good seat, and you will, no doubt, be able to manage that. There is no shooting about here, though you can occasionally get a deer among the hills. Still, it is just as well that you should learn to use a rifle. Every man in this country is a fair marksman, and, even when there is little chance of coming upon game, often rides with his rifle slung across his back. I am sure you would not like to be beaten by any of the Dutch lads. They are not such good shots now as they used to be when game was plentiful, and of course shooting is not so important here as it is in the Transvaal, where every man may be called upon at any moment to go out on commando against the natives. Still, it is the accomplishment on which Boers pride themselves, and you may find it useful if you stay in the country. For if one is to believe all these Dutchmen say, there is likely to be a lot of trouble out here before long."

"Not in this part, I suppose, uncle?"—for so Yorke had taken to call his cousin. "I know there may be a row in the Transvaal, but surely not here?"

"I don't know, Yorke. If it begins in one part, there is no saying how it will spread. I believe that if the Transvaal begins war, the Orange Free State will join. They have not a shadow of grievance. They are wholly independent of us, and have always been quiet and peaceful, and there does not seem to be any of the ill-feeling against the English that prevails in the Transvaal. Still, there is never any saying; and I believe that Steyn, their president, is a very ambitious man. This Africander Bond is doing a great deal of mischief in Cape Colony, and although the Dutch element have it pretty nearly their own way, I doubt if they will not join the Dutch across the Orange River if these rise."

"But what is it they really want?" Yorke asked.

"They want to be masters here altogether. They see the gold mines and diamond mines prospering enormously, and they think that if they could drive us out, all this wealth would come into their hands. They dream of one great Republic, and of their flag waving everywhere. I don't say that they would drive the English out altogether; their talents and energy would be useful to them, and, as in the Transvaal, they would make them pay all the taxes of the country. Kruger would, of course, be President of the Republic, but he is an old man, and Steyn would naturally be his successor. That is why he may be expected to drag the Free State into the matter should there be a row."

"But they can hardly think that England would consent to let them go?"

"That is what they do think, Yorke. Since that Majuba business, and the fatal surrender afterwards, they despise us altogether. They do not believe for a moment that we shall fight, and they are positive that if we should venture to do so, they would thrash us without the slightest difficulty. They have accumulated enormous stores of rifles and artillery, and

I believe that, as they licked us so easily when they were unprovided with these things, it will be a mere walk over now. Kruger will keep up a correspondence with Chamberlain until everything is absolutely ready, then he will break off negotiations, and there will be war—that is, if England is bold enough to venture upon it. That is the Boer idea of things, Yorke. You will hear it openly discussed up at the house. Even in the farms round here there are stores of ammunition hidden away, and if war does begin, and a material advantage is gained, you will see the whole country on fire from Cape Town to Pretoria.

"Of course, there are many of the Dutch of the better class who would far rather let things remain as they are at present. They have no ground of complaint against us; they are free to elect their own representatives, and to make their own laws; the British authority is little more than nominal, and we have not five thousand soldiers in this colony or Natal. It seems to me that the peril is a very serious one. There is nothing to prevent twenty-five thousand Boers marching into Durban, and another force of the same strength capturing Cape Town. Each force would be swollen as it went. Every man would be mounted; they would be armed with the best rifles that money could purchase, and they are good shots. They would need no transport, for they would seize the cattle of the British colonists, and plunder stores as they went. I ask you, what could five thousand infantry do against such a force?"

"It certainly looks bad, uncle — much worse than I thought."

"As far as I am concerned, Yorke, it would, I think, make but little difference to us; and as for my wife, she would hoist their flag as they came along, and probably ride herself to welcome them. So I may take it that they would not interfere with anything here; and personally I should be no worse off, for the Assembly at Cape Town could hardly be more Dutch than it is at present. The only change that I

should feel would be, that on holidays we should have the Republican flag flying on the flagstaff instead of the Union Jack, which would be a bitter pill to swallow."

"But the British colonists would join the troops, surely?"

"The British colonists are neither armed nor organized. I have no doubt that many of the younger men would try and make their way down to Cape Town, and join any force that was raised there. But all that would take time; and even if twenty thousand joined here and in Natal, what use could they be against an insurrection over a million square miles, with a great nucleus of well-armed men?"

"Well, uncle, at any rate I will steadily practise shooting; and if, as seems likely, trouble is really coming on, I shall go down to Cape Town and try to get into a new corps that is being raised."

"Well, Yorke, I shall not try to dissuade you; I have no legal authority over you; and if I were a young man, that is what I should do myself. But if you wish for any peace and quiet here, you must keep your intentions to yourself, and, above all, hold your tongue when you hear treason talked up at the house. My wife has taken to you much better than I expected. But though she, from having been at school at Cape Town, and going down there pretty often, and reading a good deal, has much better ideas of the power of England than most of her countrymen, she believes that England will not fight, and that even if it does, it will soon see the impossibility of reconquering such a tremendous country as this. And really, I cannot disagree with her after what we saw in the last war, and from what we know of the preparations the Boers have made."

"I think she is wrong, uncle. I don't say that we may be able to reconquer the whole of South Africa, but I feel sure that, whatever it costs, England will hold the Cape and Durban and the other seaports, for they are of immense importance to her."

"Let us say no more about it, lad. It is causing me a deal

of trouble; so I hold my tongue, for I can't afford to be on bad terms with all the neighbours, and in constant hot water at home. There is any amount of ammunition in the house, so you can practise as much as you like, and there are plenty of spots among the hills where you can do it quietly, and so far away from the house that there would be no chance of being heard. Of course you could occasionally fire near, for it would seem only natural to my wife that you should like to learn to shoot when everyone else does. This will be the last day that I shall ride with you; but always take Hans. He may look like a fool, but I don't think he is one. He is slim, as the Dutch say, that is, he is crafty. If he could turn his hand to anything, he would have to do a good deal more work than at present. He is like the monkeys, you know. They say they could talk well enough if they liked, but they know that if they did they would be compelled to work."

Hans' face brightened up greatly when he was told that he was freed from all other duties, and was to consider himself entirely at Yorke's disposal—a young Kaffir being at once engaged to perform the work he had previously done—and henceforth no complaint could be made of his laziness. Whatever the hour at which Yorke wanted to start, the horses were ready for him, and the boys were often out on the veldt before anyone else in the house was moving. Yorke threw himself into his work with ardour, for it suited him admirably. There were the cattle to look after, and sometimes long rides to be undertaken in search of animals that had strayed. The horses gave little trouble. A few bundles of freshly-cut grass were carried to them every morning, and with the stream handy to them they had the sense to know that they could do no better elsewhere. Several Kaffir labourers cut the corn-cobs and carried them up to a large shed near the house, while the stalks and leaves were piled into a stack for mixing with the hay in the winter.

On many farms all this was burnt as fuel, but the colonist had, soon after he became master of the farm, planted fifty

acres of fir-trees on the slopes of one of the valleys, and the clearings of these furnished an abundant stock of firewood, and indeed added materially to the returns of the farm by the sale of the surplus to neighbours.

Every day Yorke practised for an hour with the rifle, firing, not at a target, which, with its white square, resembles nothing that a soldier would have to aim at in a battle, but at some mark on a stone on the hillside, or a block of wood of the size of a man's head, half-hidden in a tussock of coarse grass on the veldt. This block Hans always carried with him when they were going shooting. Yorke practised judging distance on level and broken ground, both from the saddle and on foot, guessing it as nearly as he could, and then stepping it. At the end of four months he could judge very closely the distance of any object he saw up to seven or eight hundred yards, and was tolerably sure of hitting it. He had practised, too, shooting from the saddle.

After he had been there a short time Mr. Allnutt, seeing that he could sit any horse on the farm, had given him one of his own, which was as yet unbroken. Yorke took great pains in training it, teaching it to halt when at full gallop, to remain immovable while he fired from the saddle, or, standing by it, used it as a rest for his barrel. It would lie down when he told it, and come at his whistle. Its sire was an English hunter which Mr. Allnutt had bought to improve the strain of his horses, so that it was a faster, as well as a more powerful, animal than the native-bred horses, while possessing an equal amount of hardiness and endurance.

"I think it is the best I ever bred," he said to Yorke three months after the latter had arrived at the farm. "And I chose it for you specially, because I saw at once that you would do it credit, and that some day it might be of the utmost importance to you to be well mounted. As to myself, it does not make any difference whether I ride a mile slower or a mile faster an hour; and on the whole, I prefer going

a mile slower. Besides, you see, as a relation of mine I wish you to do me credit, and I like to take the conceit out of some of these Dutch lads, who think so much of themselves. I don't know when I was more pleased than when you beat Dirck Jansen yesterday by twenty lengths. He was always boasting that he had the best horse in this part of the colony. Of course you had the advantage of being at least two stone the lighter; but they don't take any account of weight out here. Besides, I could see that if you wanted to, you could have beaten him by twice as much. Between ourselves, I don't think your aunt was quite as well pleased as I. He is a great favourite of hers, and moreover is her cousin. However, we needn't mind that, except that I fancy you have made an enemy, and may have trouble with him by and by. These Dutch don't often forgive an injury; if they cannot avenge it at once, it rankles in their minds till they see an opportunity for wiping it out.'

CHAPTER III

A QUARREL

AS time went on, Yorke felt his position increasingly uncomfortable. The Dutch farmers became more and more aggressive in their talk. They regarded war as certain, and spoke so scoffingly of the courage of the British soldiers, and of the easiness with which they would be defeated and driven out of the country, that Yorke found it well-nigh impossible to hold his tongue, and had often to leave the room to prevent himself from breaking out.

"I am sorry, lad," his cousin said to him one day. "It is a trial to me, and I myself have sometimes to leave while they are talking. I can't well quarrel with these people, as I have to live among them; but I hope the time will come

when I shall have the satisfaction of seeing a mighty change in their tone."

"I don't mind the rest so much," Yorke said; "they are middle-aged men, and they certainly believe what they say. You have been so long with them that you are almost regarded as one of themselves, and they certainly do not take any notice of my being present, and have no thought of hurting my feelings. But it is different with Dirck Jansen; he has been unpleasant ever since I came, and now he seems bent upon picking a quarrel with me. He talks at me when he is saying insulting things about our soldiers and our people. If I stay here, one of these days I shall have a desperate row with him, which is just what he wants."

"I am afraid it is so. I have noticed it myself, and have even spoken to my wife about it; but she is prejudiced in his favour, and says that he speaks no more strongly than every true Africander should speak. Besides, what good could come of your having a quarrel with him? He is nearly nineteen, two years older than you are, and a big powerful fellow. It is what he is trying to do, and nothing would please him better than for you to give him the chance of thrashing you."

"He is a great deal stronger and bigger than I am, uncle; but I don't suppose that he has the slightest idea of boxing, and I can use my fists pretty well. I might get thrashed, but I certainly should not be thrashed easily. However, I am anxious not to have a row, and the sooner the war begins and I can enlist the better. I have stood as much as I can do, my patience has pretty well come to an end. I should not have put up with so much but for your sake."

It happened unfortunately that Dirck Jansen came over next day with four or five other farmers. The house was a favourite resort, for Mrs. Allnutt was far more hospitable than was the custom, and always produced a bottle of spirits when she had visitors, and the inducement of a free drink is one that few Boers can withstand.

"The news is good!" Dirck Jansen shouted boisterously as they rode up. "We hear there is no doubt that Steyn will go with the Transvaal, and they say that Kruger will very soon stop fooling the Rooineks, and that he has got everything now ready for kicking them out of South Africa. I should advise you to be packing up at once, young fellow. You won't have much time when we get your soldiers on the run."

"Wait till you get them on the run," Yorke replied. "It will be time enough to begin to brag then."

"Brag!" the other said scornfully. "What can fellows who don't know one end of a gun from another do against us?"

"There are a good many who know more than that, as you will find to your cost, Dirck, if you are man enough to go out and try them. There are some who can shoot straight, anyhow."

"Yourself, for instance," Dirck said scoffingly. "I hear you have been popping away among the hills, but I have not heard of your bringing in much game."

"I don't care about shooting at things that can't shoot back in return. But maybe I can shoot as straight as some of you can do."

"Do you mean myself?" Dirck replied angrily.

"Yes, I mean yourself among others, Dirck Jansen."

"Will you try?" Dirck shouted as he dismounted.

"Certainly I will. I am told you are the best shot in this neighbourhood; and if you can't beat me, who have only taken to it lately, you may acknowledge that those who shoot worse than you will have no great chance against Englishmen who shoot a great deal better than I."

"You see, all of you, this insolent young fellow has challenged me to a trial of skill," Dirck said to his companions. "I would not have condescended to compete with him, for there is no credit to be gained in beating such a boy; but he wants taking down, and I am glad to have the opportunity of doing it. Now, Mr. Allnutt, I will leave it to you to settle

the distance and the mark. I say anything between a hundred and five hundred yards; but two hundred is the general distance we have for our matches."

"What do you say to two hundred, Yorke?"

"That will suit me very well, though I should prefer a thousand."

The Boers had all dismounted.

"Then let us go out behind the house, Mr. Allnutt," one of them said, "we can easily choose a mark there."

Yorke went into the house to get his rifle, and soon joined them. They went a short distance, and then the Boer said, "That rock there is about two hundred yards away, it will make a very fair mark."

"It would be difficult to judge which is the centre," Yorke said, "and might give rise to dispute."

"That is so," the Boer said gravely. "I saw an empty tin in the yard, the bottom of that will make a very good bull's-eye."

Mr. Allnutt shouted, "Hans!" The lad was standing at the gate of the yard looking after them. He had heard the conversation, but dared not follow them. "Hans, wrench the top off that tin by the kitchen door and bring it here."

They then walked on to the rock, where, in two or three minutes, Hans joined them with the top of the tin. It had been a two-pound tin, and the circle was some four inches across.

"It will stand very well on this projection on the face," the Boer said. "It will then be as nearly as possible in the centre."

"But it will tumble down every time it is hit."

"Hans will stand near and pick it up again," Mr. Allnutt said."

"It had better be fixed," the Boer remarked. "There is a little crack in the rock, a nail driven through the tin would hold it there. It is better to do the thing properly."

Dirck laughed. "By all means do it properly, though I

cannot see why we should trouble about such a farce as this."

Mr. Allnutt paid no attention to this speech, but said, "Go and take a hammer, Hans, and a good-sized nail, and cut the bottom out of another tin and bring that here too. If three or four holes are made, the question may arise as to which is the last."

The lad ran off.

"Now, Mr. Van Laun, while he is away we may as well arrange as to how they had better shoot—how many shots each shall fire, whether they shall shoot alternately, or one fire his shots at one of the pieces of tin, and then the other take the new target. I think that will be the best, then no dispute can arise."

"I agree with you. How many times shall each fire?"

After discussion it was agreed that each should fire ten shots.

"Now, it will be fair," the Boer said, "to toss up for who shall fire first. What do you say? Heads shall mean Dirck, tails your lad."

"Do you mean, whichever wins is to have the choice?"

"No, whichever wins fires first."

The coin was spun in the air. It came down "heads". When Hans returned one of the discs of tin was nailed up at the spot arranged, then Mr. Allnutt stepped two hundred yards. Dirck unslung his rifle, and filled the magazine. Hans stood three or four yards from the rock; he knew that there was little chance of either of them missing the stone. Although Dirck had so far treated the affair as almost a joke he was not disposed to be careless, for the quiet and composed air of his young antagonist seemed to show that the latter must be at least a fair shot or he would never have carried the thing so far. As soon, therefore, as he had loaded his rifle, he took his place with greater seriousness and gravity than he had hitherto manifested. He put the gun up to his shoulder and then lowered it again.

"Is there any time-limit?" he asked.

The Boers and Mr. Allnutt consulted together a moment, then the latter said, "We have agreed that there may be half a minute between each of the first five shots, a limit of two minutes for reloading, and then half a minute between each of the last five shots."

Dirck again raised his rifle to his shoulder and almost instantaneously fired. There was a clang. Hans ran forward and pointed, with a stick he had cut, to a spot near the edge of the tin. As soon as he retired again the rifle cracked. The ten shots were all fired well within time. Hans took down the tin and ran with it to the group, and then, going to the rock, fastened the other there. Seven of the bullets had hit the tin fairly, another had cut a semicircular bit out of the edge, the other two had been outside the circle. The holes were dotted about all over the tin, but, with one exception, none was within an inch of the centre.

"That is very good shooting," Mr. Allnutt said. "Four inches are not much of a mark at two hundred yards."

"I have done better," Dirck said carelessly, "but I fancy it is quite good enough for the purpose."

Yorke now took his place at the firing-point. There was not a breath of wind blowing, and, as he had practised so often at a similar mark, he felt pretty confident that he could do better than Dirck had done. He shouted to Hans, "Do not trouble to point out where the shots strike. I would rather fire quicker."

The first five shots went off at intervals of only about ten seconds. He reloaded quickly, and again fired rapidly.

"You have not overrated your shooting," the Boer who had taken the lead in the matter said. "Every shot hit."

They walked up in a body to the target. As they neared it they uttered exclamations of surprise. The ten shots had all fairly struck the tin.

"It is a trick, an infamous trick!" Dirck exclaimed furiously. "That boy must have punched the holes before he put the tin up. It is not the one he showed us as he went along."

"It is a lie," Yorke said, "and you know it. I thought it wasn't in you to take a licking in good part. Fellows who boast so much very seldom stand being collared."

With a howl of rage Dirck pointed his rifle at him, forgetting that he had not reloaded it. He pulled the trigger, but as there was no report, he threw the gun down with an oath and flew at Yorke. The latter stood steadily, and as his assailant was on the point of closing with him, struck out with his right fist, throwing his whole strength into the blow; it caught Dirck just on the point of the chin, and he went backwards as if he had been shot. It had all passed so rapidly that the others had no time to interfere. In a moment they ran in.

"I am sorry this has happened, sir," the leading Boer said to Mr. Allnutt. "Dirck has been wrong altogether. He was the aggressor, and was fairly beaten by your lad, who is certainly a marvellous shot. He has been more thoroughly beaten now. If his rifle had been charged, he would have shot his opponent, so he richly deserved the punishment he has got. You had better take your lad away now; we will see to Dirck." Then he turned, and, as Yorke walked off with the colonist, assisted the others to raise Dirck, who was half-stunned by the blow, on to his feet.

"You have behaved shamefully, Dirck Jansen," he said sternly when he found that the young man could understand him. "You have brought discredit upon yourself and us. You have been beaten at shooting by a mere boy, and instead of taking it fairly and in a good spirit, you first accuse him of playing a trick upon you, and then try to murder him. And now, big as you are, he has knocked you silly. We are ashamed of you. Hans, go and fetch Mr. Jansen's pony. Now, Dirck, you will mount and ride off at once, and I will tell Mrs. Allnutt that you will not come to the farm again for some time, and why."

There was a murmur of approval from the others, and Dirck stood sulkily until Hans arrived with his horse; then he picked

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YORKE PROVES HIS METTLE

up his rifle, slung it over his shoulder, mounted, and rode off without a word. The others walked to the house.

"I am sorry to tell you, Mrs. Allnutt, that Dirck Jansen has behaved scandalously. He had a fair trial of skill with your husband's young cousin, and the lad beat him hollow. Then he falsely accused him of an unworthy trick, levelled his rifle, and pulled the trigger. It would have been murder had not, happily, the rifle been unloaded. Then he rushed to seize the lad, and was knocked senseless by him. I have apologized, and my friends here join me in the apology, to the young fellow, for the gross conduct of Dirck Jansen, and we trust that you will not receive Dirck in your house so long as the lad remains here."

"It seems hardly possible, Mr. Van Laun, that Dirck should have behaved so. He must have been grossly insulted to begin with. I hear that the shooting arose out of a quarrel."

"It was not exactly a quarrel, though both were angry. Dirck began by saying rough things to your lad, who was not to be blamed because he spoke up for his countrymen, just as I should have done, or any other Dutchman would have done, had an Englishman spoken so of our people."

"I am sorry to hear what you say, Mr. Van Laun," Mrs. Allnutt said somewhat stiffly. "I cannot but think that Dirck must have had great provocation."

"Dirck is a hot-headed young fool, cousin, and though I am as nearly related to him as you are, I say so without hesitation; and for my part, I am not altogether sorry that this young English lad should have given him a lesson. The fact that he is perhaps the best shot round here has cocked him up altogether unduly. He had it in his heart to commit murder to-day, for it would have been murder if there had been a cartridge in his gun; and though it would have been hard to testify against one of my own blood, I must have said so in open court had he been tried for the act. However, I hope we shall hear no more of it, and that the lads will not meet again till Dirck has come to his senses. He will hear

the truth from all of us who were present at the affair, and may be all the better for finding that he is not such a fine fellow as he thought he was."

Mrs. Allnutt did not reply. It was evident that her sympathies were entirely with Dirck. The farmers did not stop, but, mounting their horses, rode off. Mr. Allnutt went out into the yard, and, as he expected, found Yorke talking in the stables to Hans. The latter was in high glee, for he hated Dirck Jansen, who had sworn at him many a time when he did not bring his horse round as quickly as he had expected, and was once on the point of laying his whip about his shoulders when Mr. Allnutt, coming out of the house, and seeing what was about to happen, had arrested the blow by saying sternly, "Drop that, Dirck, you are not master here yet. Hans is my servant and not yours; neither you nor anyone else shall touch him."

Yorke and he were still talking when Mr. Allnutt entered and motioned to Hans to go outside.

"This is an unfortunate affair, Yorke, very unfortunate. I do not consider that you were in any way to blame, but that hardly makes it less unfortunate. Here you have beaten a fellow who was proud of his skill with the rifle; your shooting certainly astonished me, for although I knew that you had used a tremendous lot of cartridges in the past six months, I had no idea that you had done it to such good purpose. In the next place, you have floored him as neatly as I ever saw a man knocked down, and have done it with half a dozen of his own friends looking on. In the third place, you have brought him into disgrace with them, and as the story will soon get about, it will be a terrible blow to his pride.

"Now, I have never liked Dirck. He is a very bad type of the Dutchman in these parts, though, I have no doubt, he would pass muster in the Transvaal. He is rude and overbearing; and although a man may be all that, and yet at bottom a good fellow, I don't think Dirck is so. He will never forgive you, and unless I am greatly mistaken, he will try in some

way to get even with you, and will not care what steps he takes to do so. Now, you know, lad, you have been talking for some little time past of going down to Cape Town, and joining a corps newly got up there, when the war breaks out, which I am afraid it will do very shortly. I tell you frankly that, sorry as I am to say so, I think it will be better for you to do this speedily. I don't mean to-morrow or next day, but shortly. I am also sorry to say that this affair will not make matters more comfortable at home. You know my wife is very fond of Dirck, and it will take a great deal to make her believe that he could be wrong in anything. Van Laun spoke out straight to her, and said that the fellow was altogether to blame; but I could see that her sympathies were nevertheless with him, and she believes that you were at fault in the matter."

"I would go to-morrow, uncle," Yorke said; "but it would look like running away. I will stay at home for another week, and then I will go. I don't mind whether aunt is displeased with me or not. I am conscious of having done no wrong, and if she shows me that I am no longer welcome I shall tell her quietly that she will only have to put up with me for another week. It may be unpleasant, but I am not going to disappear as if I were a culprit, and afraid of Dirck Jansen."

"All right, Yorke! I can quite understand your feelings. I am heartily sorry, but I feel that you could not hope to be comfortable if you stayed here. I am sorry now that I asked you out here, but at the time I did not foresee that this ill-feeling on the part of the Dutch would become so deep and bitter. Had I done so, I would not have asked you, knowing that my wife is as prejudiced as her neighbours."

"You need not be sorry, uncle, that you invited me here. I have had a pleasant time and I have learned a great deal. If I had not been out here I should be slaving at Greek and mathematics at home, whereas now, if war breaks out, which seems almost certain, I shall have a most exciting time of it,

and when it is over I may see some way of making a start for myself."

Mrs. Allnutt did not appear at supper.

"Will you tell her, uncle," Yorke said, after talking the matter over for some time, "that I shall leave this day week, and that if my presence is obnoxious to her I will take my meals apart. I am awfully sorry that my presence here should inconvenience her, but I really cannot go away as if I had been sent off in disgrace, or were afraid to meet Dirck Jansen again."

"Quite right, lad! I hope that your aunt will be in a better state of mind to-morrow morning; but when once she takes a thing into her head she is, between ourselves, as obstinate as a mule. Well, whatever she may think of this quarrel, angry as she may be at it, she cannot but feel, after what Van Laun said, that Direk brought it upon himself. She is a fair-minded woman when she is cool, and I have no doubt, before you go, she will be really sorry; for although I acknowledge that her affections are very strongly devoted to Dirck, she has certainly during the time you have been here taken to you a good deal, and she has several times said it was wonderful how little trouble you were in the house."

"She has always been very kind, and I am really very sorry that, however innocently, I have incurred her displeasure. You know that this is so, uncle, and if there were any place near which I could go to without seeming to run away, I would leave at once rather than stop here where I am not welcome."

"Don't trouble about it, Yorke. I invited you here, and I ask you to stay. If my wife, in the teeth of what her own friends tell her, chooses to consider you to have been in the wrong, I can't help it, and no one else can. I shall not attempt to argue the matter with her. I know that presently she will see that she has acted very unfairly towards you, and I hope that she will even in time recognize that Direk Jansen is by no means what she thinks him. It matters not to me whom she leaves the farm to, but I should not like to see it go to him."

"But would you not have it, uncle?"

"No. It was a curious arrangement. The old man left his farm to her, and her children after her if she should have any; if not, she had the power of leaving it at her death to any of the descendants of his married sisters whom she might choose. But it was at her death to be valued, and should it under my management have increased in value, the increase was to be estimated by a firm of Dutch valuers whom he named, in Cape Town, and I was to receive, either in cash or as a mortgage upon the farm, the sum which they fixed as the increase in its value. The old man saw that I had good ideas and that I should improve the place, and he said to me a short time before his death, 'I should not like myself to see all these changes that you tell me you wish to make, but I have no doubt that they will increase its value. It is fair that, if my daughter dies before you, you should have the benefit of the work that you have done, so I have had the farm valued, and it will be valued again by the same firm if she dies before you, and you will receive the difference. Does that seem to you to be fair?'

"'Quite fair,' I said.

"'It will be the same thing during her lifetime. I have set down what the farm has brought me in for the past twenty years. She is to receive the average rental and to be its mistress. As I warned you before you married her, I will have no Englishman master here; but you may have the use of one-third of the income to be laid out in improvements. It is to be as a loan to you, and to be repaid from the extra profits of the place.'

"I thought the arrangement, although curious, was very fair. I need hardly say that the income is now four times as great as it was when the old man died. The money I used for improvements has long since been paid off, and I have laid by a very considerable sum. My wife and I never talk about money matters. She has the amount that was annually made by her father, with which she runs the house, and spends as

she likes. She neither asks what the farm now brings in, nor interferes with me in any way, so that we get on very well together. If she dies before me, I shall, in addition to what I have laid by, have a heavy mortgage on the farm; and between ourselves, it is morally certain that Dirck Jansen, if she leaves it to him, will never be able to pay the interest, for he will work on the old grooves, so far as he works at all, and in a couple of years after he takes possession I shall foreclose and have the farm put up to auction, in which case I hope that some Englishman will buy it. I should certainly not remain in the colony after her death.

"These are the plans I had formed for myself, Yorke, and when I was in England, and invited you to come up, it was with a vague idea that some day you might possibly succeed me here. The mortgage which I shall hold over the property is larger than anyone would be likely to bid for the farm, and I thought that I might therefore purchase it in your name. But since you have been here, I have seen that this would not do. In the first place, you would never be contented to settle down here, you have too much energy to take to the life of a farmer; and this quarrel with Dirck would alone render that plan impossible. There is an enmity already established; and if he, after coming into possession of the farm, were turned out by you, he would become your deadly enemy, and would assuredly have the sympathy of his relations, and, indeed, of all the Boers around. Therefore I shall not particularly care who buys the farm and pays off my mortgage.

"I have been very much pleased with you ever since you came here, and what was two years ago only a vague idea is now my fixed intention, and you will be my heir at my death. I have no nearer relation, and I have not felt attracted towards anyone whom I have met, except your family. Of course, I may die before my wife. In that case, my claim to the estate for the improvements I have effected will drop, though, of course, the sum I have laid by will not be affected. My opinion was asked on this subject when the old man made his

will, and I willingly agreed to it, because it seemed to me a fair one; and besides, there was no one at that time whom I cared particularly to benefit after my death."

Yorke, who was greatly surprised at what Mr. Allnutt said, began to thank him for the kindness of his intentions towards him; but the latter said: "There is no occasion at all for that. I must leave my money to someone, and as I like you better than any of my other relations it is only natural that you should be my heir. It may be a good many years before you benefit largely by it. I am only some three or four and twenty years older than you are. I live a healthy outdoor life, and I may, for aught I know, go on till I am eighty. However, now that I regard you as my heir, of course I shall give you a helping hand when you need it, and when these troubles are over, and you have learned the ways of the country, and are able to start a business with a good chance of success, I shall be ready to give you a thousand pounds to set you up in it. Or, if you decide that you would like to return home and settle in England, you will have that sum to pay your expenses at college, and such further sum as may be required to maintain you until you are in a position to keep yourself. There, do not let us say anything more about it now, my boy. I should advise you not to go outside the farm until you leave. The Boers seldom forgive an injury. Certainly Dirck Jansen will not be an exception to the rule, and, if he has a chance, will attempt to do you harm. For example, he might pick a quarrel with you, which might come to a shooting affray, and although you may be a better shot than he is, he would not hesitate to fire first. We had an example of that to-day, so you must keep out of his way till you go. He certainly will not come here for the next week, after what Van Laun, who may be considered the head of his family, said. Now, lad, I feel tired after this unusual excitement, so we may as well go off to bed."

Yorke did not get to sleep for some time. He was naturally excited as well as surprised at the news of his cousin's inten-

tions towards him, and felt that it would make an immense difference to him. In the most favourable circumstances, he could not have hoped to save a sum that would enable him to start for himself, or to obtain a share in any established business. Now, his cousin's generous offer would enable him to begin to climb the ladder as soon as he was qualified to do so. As to the alternative of returning to England and going to the University, he set it aside at once. He liked the life in South Africa, and would not have cared to take up that of a student again, with the prospect of becoming a hard-working curate in a poor neighbourhood, or years of waiting for briefs as a young barrister. With a business out there, he might soon be able to help them at home, to supply his sisters with pocket-money, and, most pleasant of all, to be able to present his mother with a carriage, and a pair of horses, such as they used to drive before. With such pleasant thoughts in his mind he at last fell off to sleep, and in the morning, after as usual partaking of a bowl of milk and bread, started for his ride round the farm with Hans in attendance.

Three days passed quietly. Mrs. Allnutt had so far relaxed as to come down to meals, and although she spoke as little as possible to Yorke, she was at least civil. On the fourth morning he took his rifle and went up the valley to practise for the first time since his contest with Dirck. Hans was some little distance behind him. As he was on the point of dismounting, he caught the gleam of a rifle-barrel behind a rock two hundred yards away. He did not hesitate for an instant, but threw himself from his horse. The action saved his life, for, as he did so, a shot was fired, and the ball went through his hat, slightly grazing his head. As his feet touched the ground he fell with his face towards the rock, unslinging his rifle as he did so and letting it fall in front of him, still grasping it close to the trigger.

With an almost imperceptible movement he brought the butt to his shoulder, and then lay perfectly still. His face was downward, and from a short distance seemed to be on the

ground, but in reality he was able to look under the brim of his hat. For two or three minutes he lay thus, then he saw Dirck Jansen cautiously look out from behind the rock. For a minute he did not move, then he slowly rose and pointed his rifle at some object behind Yorke. The latter did not doubt that he was taking aim at Hans. The moment the thought struck him, he fired, and Dirck dropped his rifle, which exploded as it touched the ground, and fell forwards. A few seconds later Hans galloped up.

"Are you hurt, master?" he exclaimed. "I heard the shot, and thought that you had not waited for me, until I saw you lying there. I then caught sight of Dirck, and saw him point his rifle at me. I thought I was dead; for although you beat Dirck, he is a fine shot, and at three hundred yards could not have missed me. Then I saw your rifle flash."

"It is a bad business, Hans. He tried to take my life, and thought that he had succeeded. It was a near shave, as you see; the bullet went through my hat. But I was in the act of dismounting, and he fired an inch or two too high." He put his hand on the top of his head. When he looked at it it was covered with blood.

"It is just as well," he said, as Hans uttered an exclamation of alarm. "It is only a graze. If he had missed me altogether, my story might not have been believed. Now, let us go and see what has happened to him. I hope I have not killed him. If I had had time I should have aimed at his shoulder, but I knew that in another instant he would have fired at you, and I just sighted him and pulled the trigger."

They went over to where Dirck was lying. He had been hit high up in the chest. "Three inches farther up and I should only have broken his collar-bone," Yorke said regretfully. "Even as it is, I hope that he may recover. These Mauser bullets do comparatively little damage if they do not hit a vital point. It is certainly so with game. Now, Hans, lay him down as before. I will ride back to the farm and send back help to bring him in."

Yorke returned to his horse, mounted it, and rode back at full speed. Mr. Allnutt had just risen and come out into the yard.

"What is it, Yorke?" he asked in alarm on seeing the lad's pale face and a small stream of blood running down his face.

Yorke related what had happened.

"The young scoundrel!" the colonist exclaimed indignantly. "Well, at any rate you are not to blame, Yorke; but it is a desperately bad business. Fortunately you have Hans to prove that your account of the attempt at assassination is true, and you were perfectly justified in shooting; but still, it will make the feud worse than ever. I trust sincerely that his wound will not prove mortal. I will send off a mounted man at once to Richmond for a surgeon, and will go out with four Kaffirs to bring the unfortunate young fellow in. Then I will ride over with you and Hans to Van Laun's; he is a justice of the peace. You can make your deposition before him, and I will give my guarantee to produce you if Dirck should die. Having done this, you had better start at once for Cape Town, and when you get there telegraph your address to me, so that I can send for you if necessary."

"Very well, uncle, that will certainly be the best way. I could not stop here now. I trust most earnestly that he will recover. If I had had time to take aim I would only have disabled him, but I knew that if I did not fire instantly he would have shot Hans."

"No doubt he thought that he had shot you through the head, and intended to rid himself of the only witness. I do not pity him one bit, whatever happens to him. He was a murderer in intention, and if he has failed, it is not his fault. I think that even my wife will have her eyes opened now as to his real character. That he should have aimed his rifle at you before in the heat of passion was to some extent excusable; but this was an attempt at premeditated murder, and if he recovers he ought to have a few years in prison. However, that will be for you to decide."

"If I were coming back to live here I would certainly prosecute him, for he might make another attempt with better success; but, as it is, I shall not move in the matter. I will go out with you and the Kaffirs now. I could not be hanging about here doing nothing until he is brought in."

On arriving at the spot they found that Dirck was still alive, though unconscious. He was carefully placed on the hurdle that a Kaffir had brought with him, and was taken back to the house, Mr. Allnutt going on before to tell his wife what had happened. He came out of the door as Yorke arrived with the bearers, saw Dirck carried upstairs, and then came down again.

"I will leave him there in her care," he said; "she will see after him. She did not make any remark when I told her what had happened, beyond saying, 'Is there any proof as to the truth of this story?' 'There is this for proof,' I said. 'Hans heard one shot, and one shot only, fired as he rode up, then he saw Dirck rise and take aim at him. Then, as Yorke fired he saw him fall. The first shot that was fired was fired by Dirck, and the proof is that the ball went through Yorke's hat, and the lad is bleeding from a scalp wound there. As the affair happened on our farm there could have been no quarrel between the two lads, for Hans was but a short distance behind when the first shot was fired; and as Dirck fell nearly three hundred yards from the spot where Yorke was lying they could not have been near enough for them to have had words. What is more, he saw Dirck rise from behind the rock where he had been lying hid, and when he pointed that out to me I found the empty cartridge lying there.' She then only said, 'Bring him up here; he is my cousin.' Now we will ride over to Van Laun's. We shall have time to do so before the doctor arrives; it is only a quarter of an hour's gallop."

Ordering Hans to follow him he mounted and galloped off with Yorke. Mr. Van Laun looked very grave when he heard the story.

"Unfortunate lad," he said; "this is the result of his un-

restrained passions. Now, Mr. Harberton, will you please write down your account of the affair, and I will swear you to it. Then I will get you to retire, and will have Hans in."

When the two statements had been sworn to he called Yorke in again.

"Of course," he said, "if Dirck dies there must be an enquiry into this. In any case, there must be an enquiry, if you insist upon it. Mr. Allnutt will give us his surety that you will appear if he dies."

"I should be well content to drop the matter, sir, if Dirck lives, as I sincerely hope he will. It is a most unfortunate affair, and greatly to be regretted. However, related as he is to Mrs. Allnutt, I certainly have no wish to press the matter against him. I am going away from here, and am not likely to return unless I am obliged to do so. And for my aunt's sake, if for no other reason, I should regret extremely to bring so heavy a charge against one to whom she is so attached."

"I thank you, sir. I am the unhappy fellow's uncle, and for my own part and that of the family I feel deeply indebted to you for your forbearance. I am glad, however, that you are about to leave, for the ties of blood here count for a great deal. Although we older men see his fault in the gravest light, there are hot spirits among the young men who might, in spite of the fact that he had been utterly in the wrong, take up his quarrel. I will now ride back with you and hear the surgeon's report."

This turned out to be favourable rather than otherwise. Without being able to give any decided opinion, the surgeon said that if all went well, and no fever set in, Dirck might recover. "The ball," he said, "has gone right through, and has undoubtedly passed through the upper part of the lung; but the wound is so small that it will probably heal up without leaving any after-effects. If, however, fever sets in, I do not disguise from you that the result may be fatal, although I regard the probabilities as being altogether the other way. As the bullet has passed through there is little for me to

do. He must be kept very quiet, and given cooling drinks for some days. I shall ride over and see him to-morrow. If he is going on well, he will be able to take a little nourishment in the way of soup in the course of two or three days."

The news was an immense relief to Yorke. He felt that had the affair happened again he could not have acted otherwise; but the thought that he might have taken life was very painful. If it had been done in the course of a battle he would have thought comparatively little of it, but this was altogether different; and although Dirck had been exceptionally rude and discourteous to him, and he would have liked to give him a good thrashing, he would have given much rather than be the cause of his death. When the surgeon had left, and Mr. Van Laun, after a few words with Mrs. Allnutt, had also ridden off, the colonist said:

"Now, Yorke, the sooner you are off the better. You will, of course, take Bob. He is the best horse on the farm, and I don't think you will get any better in the colony. And in the work you will have to do, your life may depend upon the speed of your horse."

"Will you let me take Hans with me?"

"He has been speaking to me about it. He is most anxious to go with you. Of course he is free to go whether I like it or not; but indeed I shall be glad to know that he is with you. He has brightened up wonderfully since you came, and there can be no doubt that he is devoted to you."

"Thank you! Of course I cannot say whether I shall be able to keep him; that will depend on what corps I join. If I enlist in the line, I should hardly think they would take Hans; but if I join a Colonial corps, they may do so, for loyal Dutchmen would naturally be accepted. At any rate, I shall do all I can to keep him with me."

"And now, as to your traps, Yorke. First, I suppose you will ride down?"

"It would certainly be most pleasant; besides, if I went by train there would be a bother about getting a horse-box."

"Quite so. Well, I will pack up all your things to-morrow, and send them to Cape Town in a day or two, marked 'To be left till called for', so that you will find them at the goods station when you arrive there. You may as well leave the rifle here. It would be all very well carrying it as you go through the country districts, but it would hardly do to ride with it into Cape Town. I have another of the same kind, and will put it in for Hans. I have a long box that will hold them very well, and can pack with them some of the clothes you have bought since you have been here, and which will certainly not go into the portmanteau you brought with you."

Hans was delighted when he heard that he was to accompany Yorke. No time was needed for his preparations.

"You are to take the horse I usually ride, Hans," Mr. Allnutt said; "he may need a spare horse for his work, and it is as well that while you are with him you should be well mounted, so as to be able to go at the same pace as he. Put the saddle on at once; it is nearly twelve o'clock, and you have a long ride to Victoria West, where, of course, you will sleep to-night. Come in with me, Yorke, I will put that cold meat on the table and you can sit down and eat something. All these things have put breakfast out of our heads, and you have had nothing since you rode off at six o'clock."

"I don't feel hungry, uncle."

"Oh, nonsense! You must eat."

As soon as he had helped Yorke he cut off a large chunk of meat and a slice of bread and carried them out to Hans.

"That is right, lad," he said, when Yorke had made a good meal, for he had found his appetite when he once began to eat. "Now, put this cheque into your pocket, it is for one hundred pounds; you may want to get uniform, and may in any case have to wait some little time before you can arrange matters. Here are twenty pounds for your expenses on the road. In the envelope with the cheque is a note to the manager of the bank, authorizing him to allow you to draw on me up to

another hundred pounds should you require it. There, I don't want any thanks, lad. You know how we stand now, and the sooner you are off the better."

"Do you think my aunt would like me to say good-bye to her? I should certainly like to do so. She has been very kind while I have been here."

"I will ask her, Yorke, but I don't think she will. However, it is just as well to make the offer."

Rather to Yorke's surprise, Mrs. Allnutt came into the room a minute later. "Good-bye, Yorke!" she said gravely. "I cannot say, after what has happened, that I am sorry that you are going, but I am very sorry for the circumstances that have caused you to go. You have been very nice in the house since you came. I had thought, before you arrived, that I should not like it, but it has made things pleasant, and I came to like you. Good-bye! I hope you will do well. Some day, perhaps, I may see you again, if not here, perhaps at Cape Town."

"Good-bye, aunt! I am very much obliged to you for the kindness you have shown me since I have been here. I cannot say how sorry I am that things should have turned out as they have. No one can possibly regret it more than I."

Five minutes later Yorke and Hans mounted and started on their journey.

CHAPTER IV

THE ULTIMATUM

NOW, Hans," Yorke said as they dismounted in front of the hotel at which he had stopped when he came through Cape Town, "the first thing after you have put the horses in the stable, given them a good rub down, and seen that they have had their feed, will be to go to some little barber's shop and have your hair trimmed. Have it

cut short like mine. When you have done that, have a thorough good wash. You are more particular in that respect than you used to be when I first knew you, but there is room for a lot of improvement; and as you have made up your mind to follow my fortune whatever it may be, it is as well, at any rate when you join, to look clean. Here are five pounds, go to an outfitter's and get a decent suit of clothes—clothes that will fit you, you know, and not look as if they were made for a man fifty inches round the waist. Look about you as you go through the streets. You will see plenty of young Dutchmen who have come in from farms, and you will find they wear very different-looking clothes from those you were accustomed to. Get things of the same sort. Or—no; I think that it would be better for you to come to me after you have got yourself tidy, and I will go with you."

"That will be better, Master Yorke; I should never be able to choose for myself."

"Very well, give me the money, then, less five shillings. Be sure you tell the man to cut your hair quite short; it won't hold the dust so much then, and will give you quite a different appearance. Don't come back again for three or four hours. I want to learn what is doing here, and see what openings there are. Get yourself a good meal somewhere."

The hotel was almost full, but Yorke was able to obtain a room. He changed the clothes that he had worn and put on a suit of tweeds he had kept for special occasions, and then went down to the dining-hall. As he ate he listened to the conversation at the tables round him. He learned that large numbers of British officers had been quietly arriving, but that they were as yet in ignorance of the work they had been sent out to perform.

At present the greater portion were waiting for orders, but it was believed that most of them would be employed in the work of superintending the transport on the railway, and that if war really broke out, many would be placed in command of

the bodies of volunteers to act as scouts, which would doubtless be raised in the colonies.

Everything was still doubtful, and Yorke heard fears expressed that Kruger would back down at the last moment. He made up his mind that he would do nothing hurriedly; he had money enough to keep him for a considerable time, and it was better not to make a choice that he might afterwards regret. There were sure to be opportunities directly the matter came to a crisis.

Among the officers were many civilians, men who had come down from Johannesburg, and these he found were almost unanimous in their opinion that Kruger and his advisers were all bent on war. These occupied several tables, and the ladies with them were dressed in the latest styles of fashion, and wore an extravagant amount of jewellery. He guessed the husbands to be mining potentates and speculators, men whose fortunes were already assured, and who could afford to contemplate the worst that could happen without anxiety.

After he had finished his meal he went out, and stood on the steps of the hotel until Hans came up. He would hardly have known him, for he looked, for the first time in Yorke's experience, thoroughly clean, and the change made by this, and the loss of the long unkempt hair that had fallen to his shoulders, was almost startling. In spite of his loose, ill-fitting clothes, he looked bright and alert, although somewhat shamefaced at his altered appearance.

"I have done as you told me, Master Yorke, but I feel so queer that I hardly know myself."

"That will soon pass off, Hans; and you look a hundred per cent better. Now, let us go off to one of the stores."

Here he found no difficulty in obtaining a suit that fairly fitted his follower. It consisted of acorded velveteen shooting-jacket, and breeches of the same material; brown stockings of a colour to match; a waistcoat to be put on when the evening's cold set in; four flannel shirts, and a couple of dark-blue silk neck-ties. From the same store he procured two pairs of

strong laced boots. A wide-awake of the ordinary size completed the attire. Hans had already, at Yorke's orders, hired a room for himself, and his new purchases having been put in a bag, he carried them off to it. Yorke remained outside for a quarter of an hour, and Hans then rejoined him in his new clothes.

"I am quite sure, Hans, you might ride up to the house, and neither your master nor mistress would know you, but would take you for some young farmer stopping on his way down country to ask for a night's hospitality."

"I don't know how I look, Master Yorke, but I don't feel comfortable at all. There doesn't seem room for me to move in these clothes."

"Nonsense, Hans! They are loose everywhere, though not so baggy as the others. By the way, you had better keep the others; you would be less likely to be noticed in them if you entered a strange place than you would be now."

"I don't care about being noticed," Hans said. "I would have as much right to be there as anyone else."

Yorke laughed. "Well, Hans, as you have agreed to go with me—and you know very well that my intention is, if possible, to get some job with our army—I can see that there might be plenty of occasions when you might be going into places with me where we should not wish to be noticed."

A day or two after his arrival, as Yorke stood on the doorsteps hesitating which way he should go, a young officer who was entering stopped and looked hard at him. "Hulloa!" he said, "you are Harberton, are you not?"

"Yes, and you are Parkinson."

"What in the world brings you out here? Why, you were quite a youngster when I left the old school to enter Sandhurst two years ago, and now you are nearly as tall as I am!"

"I have been out here six months."

"What have you been doing?"

"I have been at a farm up-country belonging to a cousin of my father. As to what I have been doing, I can only say

RHODESIA
Tuli
Palachwe
Limpopo R.
Pietersburg
Leydsdorp
Olifants R.
TRANSVAAL
Lydenburg
Komati Poort
Pretoria
Olifants R.
MAFEKING
Johannesburg
Middleburg
Barberton
Lorenco Marques
PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA
Potchefstroom
Vereeniging
Vryburg
Klerksdorp
Vaal R.
Standerton
Heilbron
Kroonstad
Lindley
ORANGE RIVER
Bethlehem
Winburg
KIMBERLEY
Brandfort
Bloemfontein
Modder R.
Riet R.
Modder River
Ladybrand
Ficksburg
Masera
COLONY
BASUTO
LAND
Belmont
Wepener
Orange R.
Caledon R.
Bethulie
De Aar
Colesberg
Herschel
Burghers Dorp
Aliwal North
Barkley East
Naauw Poort
Stormberg
Molteno
Middleburg
Sterkstroom
CAPE COLONY
Graaff Reinet
Gt. Fish R.
East London
Grahams Town
Port Elizabeth
Dundee
Elandslaagte
LADYSMITH
Greytown
Tugela R.
Pietermaritzburg
Durban
NATAL
SOUTH EASTERN AFRICA.
Scale of Miles
0 50 100 150 200

I have been riding, and shooting, and learning to speak Dutch."

"And have you learnt to speak it?"

"Yes, I can speak it well enough to pass as a Boer in a short conversation."

"Well, come and sit down in the garden behind the hotel and tell me all about it. I suppose you are wanting to get up to the front—wherever that may be—and as I came out with a good many men who will be employed in organizing and transport, and other jobs of the sort, I may be able to help you, if I know something about what you have been doing out here."

Yorke told his old school-fellow why he had left Rugby and come out, his life at the farm, and the events which had led to his leaving it suddenly.

"You have done awfully well," Parkinson said when Yorke had finished his story, "and you deserve to get on. Anyhow, if I can help you, I will."

Three weeks passed quietly; as yet nothing was settled. Kruger's replies to Mr. Chamberlain's despatches were more and more unsatisfactory; still, the general feeling at the Cape was that he would back down at the last moment and grant the terms of suffrage for which the colonial secretary was pressing. The refugees from Johannesburg were not of this opinion. "We believe he means to fight," said one of a group gathered in the billiard-room, "and I hope with all my heart that he will now do so. What does it matter to us whether he gives the suffrage to men after a five years' or seven years' residence. In the first place, he has always broken his engagements, and if he were to agree to a five years' suffrage, he would devise some means for cheating us out of it afterwards; besides, not one in twenty of the Uitlanders would take the trouble to claim it. In the first place, they would know that the members they might return for the few towns where they are in a majority would be swamped by the representatives of the country districts; and

in the next place, they know that if they took the oath to the Transvaal Government, they would forfeit the right of complaining to England of any ill-treatment, and, whatever their position, might be commandeered and sent off to fight Swazis, or any other savages, at a moment's notice. No, no; the thing is begun now, and it had best be carried through, whatever it costs. It will have to be settled some day or other, and the sooner the better."

There was a general chorus of assent.

"I only hope," another said, "that there will soon be an end of all this talk. It has been going on for nearly a year now, and we are not one day nearer to a conclusion. Trade is at a stand-still, and the Boers are not fools enough to buy goods when they expect to be able to grab them without payment, as they will do directly the war begins."

Hans had during his rides and talks with Yorke completely imbibed the latter's opinions. As a farm servant he had previously heard little or nothing on the subject, and was therefore quite ready to accept his companion's views as to the dispute, especially as he was serving under an English master against whom he had no cause of complaint. At Cape Town he found nothing to alter his opinions. The loyal part of the population, which formed the large majority there, were far more outspoken than the Africanders, and the sight of the soldiers in the streets, of the flags waving on the public buildings and on the ships of war—the same flag as he had seen hoisted on the farm on holidays—confirmed his feeling of loyalty, and he was prepared to follow Yorke in whatever service he might engage.

One morning when Yorke came down to breakfast he saw that something unusual had happened. Instead of sitting down to the meal, the residents were standing in groups, talking excitedly. He went up to Parkinson, who was looking delighted, and asked: "What is the news?"

"Splendid, Harberton! Kruger has sent in the most insolent ultimatum that ever was drawn up, demanding an

entire surrender of our claims and the withdrawal of our troops, and giving only forty-eight hours for an answer. Of course that means war. The old fox has been fooling us until he was absolutely ready to begin. I expect he will be crossing the frontier at once, and certainly we have no troops that can stop him out here. There are enough in Natal to make a fight of it; but he will have it all his own way in Cape Colony until we get troops out from England. By that time they will have raiding parties all over the country; and there is no doubt that they will be joined by thousands of Dutch farmers. This ultimatum is a glorious thing. No one can say that we forced the war upon them. It puts a stop to all these negotiations and settles the question. It has got to be fought out now; and, thank God, we have not got a government that will permit another Majuba surrender. I expect we shall have hard fighting for a time."

"What would you advise me to do, Parkinson? I don't care in what capacity I go up. I should not like to enlist in the infantry, because I should lose the advantage that I have in being a good rider and being able to speak Dutch. But I would enlist in any capacity in which Dutch would be useful."

"I have no idea what any of us are going to do yet. No doubt some general orders will come from home to-day, and I expect that most of us will be at once sent up the line to see about forming depots, to guard the bridges, and things of that sort. At any rate, there is not much chance of your getting to know anything definite for a few days. Butler and all the heads of the departments will be too busy to go into details. Certainly one of the first steps will be to organize a transport train; without that we should be tied to the railway."

The news had already spread through the town, and the excitement in the streets was great. Most people believed that war must come sooner or later, but the sudden outbreak was altogether unexpected.

There was, however, a feeling of relief that matters had come to a head at last, and that Kruger had placed himself so hopelessly in the wrong by his insolent defiance. Still, there was an uneasy impression that the course he had taken was, in his own interests, a wise one. England had been caught altogether unawares. It was true that a few thousand officers and men had been quietly sent out during the past few months; still, there was no force that could hope to withstand the fifty or sixty thousand mounted men with whom the Boers could at once invade Cape Colony and Natal. No doubt was entertained that the Orange Free State would join the Transvaal. Steyn was known to be a most ambitious man, and to be in the closest communication with Kruger, and among those staying in the hotel who had come down from Kimberley, or who had connections there, it was regarded as certain that one of the first movements attempted by the Boers of the Free State would be to try to capture Kimberley, which lay close to their frontier line.

In the evening Yorke again met Parkinson. "A party of Engineers are going up to De Aar, a big depot is about to be formed there. They take with them a lot of Kaffirs, to mark out the ground and clear it. I am glad to hear that there are a biggish lot of stores already collected here. Only one train a day will be open to the public, and I expect that will soon be stopped. I tell you what I will do, Harberton. I will take you to Colonel Pinkerton. I believe he will be going up to-morrow to inspect the line, and probably will for the present take command all along it. He came over in the same ship with me, and is a very good fellow. I will tell him who you are, what you can do, and what you want to do. At any rate, his advice will be worth having."

"Thank you very much!"

Parkinson moved away towards a party of officers talking together, waited till they broke up, and then went up to one of them. They talked for two or three minutes, then he turned and motioned to Yorke to come up.

"So you are a school-fellow of Parkinson's?" the officer said.

"Yes, sir; we were at Rugby together, but he was very much my senior."

"So you want to do scouting business, to carry despatches, and generally make yourself useful. He says that you are a good rider and an excellent shot, and that you talk Dutch well."

"Fairly well, sir; well enough, I think, to pass as a Boer in any short conversation."

"And you have a Dutch lad with you upon whom you can rely?"

"Yes, sir, I can rely upon him absolutely."

"There is no doubt that you would be very useful. You know a good deal about the sentiments of the Dutch?"

"Yes, sir, at least of the Dutch for twenty miles round Richmond and Brakpoort; they are almost to a man hostile, and I fancy from what I heard it is the same in most districts."

"I will think the matter over; there is no hurry for a few days. If the Boers advance to-morrow, when the time they have given us is up, and push straight on, which would certainly seem to be their best policy, we cannot move forward, but shall have to stand wholly on the defensive till reinforcements arrive from home; and to take stores up-country will simply mean their falling into the hands of the Boers. If I go up I shall certainly be glad to take you with me. Your boy would be invaluable in the way of obtaining information, if he is as sharp as you say he is trustworthy, but I see a difficulty in employing you both as civilians."

There was great satisfaction in Cape Town when the news came that government had announced in the House that arrangements had already been made for the instant transport of seven thousand men from India. Two days later Yorke received an invitation to breakfast with the colonel. He found a third person at the small table that the officer had secured.

"This is Mr. Harberton," the latter said, "the young gentleman of whom I was speaking to you, Major Mack-

intosh. Major Mackintosh is in command of one of the local volunteer corps here, and at my request, Mr. Harberton, he has arranged to give you a commission in his corps, and to allow you to be seconded for service as one of my assistants. I think that will meet all difficulties. While on service you will, of course, receive the pay of your rank, and an allowance for horse and forage. Your boy must also enlist in the corps, and will similarly obtain leave to go as your servant; he will, while on duty, draw the pay and rations of a private."

"Thank you indeed, sir," Yorke said gratefully; "and thank you also, Major Mackintosh; this is more than I had ever ventured to hope for."

"I had the more pleasure in granting the colonel's request," the officer said, "inasmuch as I am myself a public-school boy. I am an Etonian, and can quite understand your eagerness to take part in this business. I have large numbers of applications for enlistment, and I have no doubt that as matters progress several fresh corps will be raised. My staff of officers is nearly made up, but I have no difficulty in granting you a commission, as when you are seconded for other duties it will leave a vacancy, so that it is a mere matter of arrangement. I will send in your name to-day to Sir William Butler. You had better attend at once at the orderly room, with your Dutch servant, to be sworn in, and then get your uniforms. I dare say you know what they are."

"Yes, sir; I saw the corps march through the streets the other day."

"Of course you will not want a full-dress uniform, Mr. Harberton," the colonel said; "and you will take up your civilian clothes, both those you stand in and the dress of a Dutch farmer; and your servant will do the same, and will, of course, dress as a farm hand when he is away on any scouting expedition."

"Certainly, sir. I suppose I can bring my rifle with me?"

"Yes; what rifle is it?"

"A Lee-Metford, sir."

"That is right; it would be of no use taking up one that would not carry government ammunition."

"How long have you been in the colony, Mr. Harberton?" the major asked.

"Six months, sir."

"You have done well to learn the language so quickly."

"The cousin with whom I was staying, sir, married a Dutch lady, and as he had been out here twenty years, Dutch was generally spoken in the house. I spent my whole time in riding and practising shooting, and I always had this Dutch boy with me. He talks English, but we talked when together in Dutch, as I was anxious to learn it."

"I suppose you were accustomed to ride before you came out here?"

"Yes, my father kept three horses, and bred them, so that I learned to ride as far back as I can remember."

"You left school early, for you cannot be past seventeen yet?"

"Yes, sir. My father is a clergyman, and had a good private income, but the Birmingham and Coventry Bank, in which his money was all invested, went to smash, and as the living was by no means a rich one, I had to leave school. I had been invited here by my cousin, when he was in England a year before, and it was thought that I could not do better than to come out to him, and after being with him for a time, try to make my own way."

"And so you left him because you thought war was coming on?"

Yorke smiled. "Not exactly, sir, though I had made up my mind to do so if there was war; but I really left him because of a row with a Dutch cousin of my cousin's wife. I think it was partly jealousy at my being established at the farm, but the actual quarrel was about shooting. He was very proud of his marksmanship, and I beat him in a trial of skill. Two days afterwards he shot at me when I was out riding. He put a ball through my hat, and made sure he had killed me;

but I returned the fire, and hit him. I was afraid at first that I had killed him, but he was not dead when I came away. Fortunately, Hans, my boy, was with me, and was able to prove that he fired the first shot; but my cousin said that I had better leave at once, for the affair would create an ill-feeling among his friends, and my life would not be safe. So off I came. My cousin provided me well with money, so I thought that, before deciding upon what to do, I would wait and see if war really broke out; but in any case I thought of enlisting in a cavalry regiment. I might get a commission some day, and if I didn't, a few years in the ranks would perhaps do me good. I could buy myself out when I was able to see some other way to earn a living."

"That was as wise a determination as you could have taken under the circumstances," the colonel said. "A few years in the army does no man any harm, if he is steady and well-conducted; and if well educated, as you are, he is certain to get his stripes in a couple of years. The life of a non-commissioned officer is by no means an unpleasant one; and there is always a chance of getting a commission, though this is not a very bright one, as so many young fellows who, having failed to pass, enter the ranks with the hope of getting one some day."

Then the talk turned to the probable course of the war. The two officers agreed that if the Boers contented themselves with holding the passes into Natal, and threw their force, which was estimated at fifty thousand, in five divisions, each ten thousand strong, into Cape Colony, they could sweep the whole country up to Cape Town before any force could arrive from England to arrest their progress, and that in their advance their numbers would probably be doubled by recruits from the discontented portion of the Dutch population.

"I am in great hopes that they will besiege Kimberley," the colonel said. "Our having of the diamond mines there has always been a sore point with the Free State, and one of their reasons for joining the Transvaal undoubtedly is to obtain possession, which I feel sure they will not do. Then possibly

a considerable force of the Transvaal men may knock their heads against Mafeking It is the nearest point to Pretoria, and it was from there that the Jameson Raid started. They may take that. Baden-Powell, who is a first-rate man, went up to take the command there ten days ago. He is sure to defend the place till the last, but even if he does but hold out for a fortnight, the time gained will be invaluable to us. Time is everything. But in any case, I fear that it is going to be a very big job, certainly a great deal bigger than anything we have had since the mutiny.

"If we could but get all the Boers together, fifty thousand men might do it. As it is, we may want double that number, though I do not think the home government has any idea that such a force will be requisite. We made the usual hideous mistake of not being ready, and the still greater one of allowing the Boers to obtain enormous quantities of rifles and ammunition. When our government were first warned of what was going on, they should have put their foot down, and told Kruger bluntly that, as he could be arming in this tremendous manner only for war with us, we should not allow the importation of arms into the colony."

"They could have got them up through Lourenço Marques," the major said.

"Well, then, government should have gone a step further. They should have told Portugal that, although we did not wish to quarrel with her, we insisted upon her refusing to allow arms to be landed at Lourenço Marques, that we should send a military officer as our consul there to inspect all imports, and that we should station a ship of war there to support him, as it would be impossible for us to allow the port to be used as a centre through which military munitions, intended to be some day used against us, might be passed up-country."

"But if Portugal refused, as she no doubt would, to submit to such a high-handed action, she would probably have been supported by several European nations—certainly by France in her present mood, possibly by both Russia and Germany."

"In that case," the colonel said, "we should have had two alternatives: either to fight the lot of them with our fleet, which we could do; or else to send five thousand men up into the Transvaal to Komati Poort, and so to prevent the arms entering from the Portuguese frontier. The Boers were then comparatively unarmed, and if, as is likely, they had chosen to fight, we should have had a fairly easy job. The Queen has sovereign rights there, and it is no great stretch of sovereign rights to quarter troops in the country. However, I have no doubt they would have fought; after our surrender at Majuba, they thought, and still think, themselves invincible. But the affair would have been mere child's play to what it will be at present. It was a difficult problem, no doubt, for a British ministry to face, but it ought to have been faced. It was a question of grasping the nettle. With such a majority as they have got behind them, stronger men would not have hesitated to do so. A fire can be put out easily enough when it once starts, but if it is left alone till it has got a big hold, there is no saying what may happen when there is a strong wind blowing."

"Now, Hans," Yorke said, after having told the news to his follower, "you have to do credit to yourself and me, to try and look smart when you are in uniform, to keep those long arms of yours from swinging about, to hold your head up, and to walk briskly and smartly."

"I will do my best, Master Yorke," Hans said with a grin; "but I don't think I shall ever look like those soldiers I have seen walking about the street, especially those chaps with trousers that look so tight. I can't make out how they can sit down."

"Those are the cavalry, Hans; you won't be expected to look like them. I fancy the corps here wear white in summer; but that is certainly not a good colour for campaigning, and the major said that there was some talk of dyeing them a sort of light brown, that wouldn't show the dirt, and would not want so much washing, and, above all, would not make such

a conspicuous mark for an enemy. It is the same sort of colour as the regular troops wear here in summer, and I expect that in a short time they will all take to it instead of scarlet."

"Well, I don't care much how they dress me, so long as they let me go with you, Master Yorke."

After going to the head-quarters of the corps, and being sworn in, Yorke went to the tailor who had the contract for the uniforms. He found that Major Mackintosh had just come in, and had ordered that no more uniforms should be made for members of the corps until they heard again from him, which would be the next morning, as he had summoned a council of the officers. Yorke and Hans were, however, measured, and the tailor promised to put their uniforms in hand directly he received the major's instructions to go on.

Yorke had been invited by the adjutant to attend the meeting of the officers. He listened to the discussion, and was glad to learn that khaki drill was generally approved of as the material for the uniforms of the corps, to be used with brown belts and accoutrements, and wide-brimmed felt hats of the same colour as the coats. He was introduced to the other officers by Major Mackintosh, who laughingly told them that they must make the most of him, as Colonel Pinkerton had requisitioned him for service.

The following morning Hans was set to work drilling with a batch of other recruits. This was not necessary in Yorke's case, as he had for two years been a member of the Rugby Cadet corps, and therefore knew as much of drill as most of the officers. Thus, when in the cool of the evening the whole corps turned out, he was able to play his new part satisfactorily. Colonel Pinkerton had strolled down to witness the drill. The gathering was a very motley one, for the men were not in uniform, and all classes were represented.

"I was glad to see you knew your work," the colonel said to him on his return. "You did not tell me that you knew anything of soldiering."

"I do not know very much, sir; but I was a member of the school corps for two years, and we flattered ourselves we were pretty smart. Of course many of the fellows were meant for the army, and were very keen about it. But I think we all took a good deal of pride in drilling well, and though I was not an officer, of course I knew where the officers should be placed in each movement."

"Well, you will not want it much while you are with me; but when you are among soldiers it is as well to be able to show that you know the work of an officer. At present there is no idea whatever of the volunteers going to the front; but there is no saying what may take place in the course of a few weeks, if the Boers are sharp enough to take advantage of the situation."

Three days later Yorke and Hans started with the colonel up the line. He had two young Engineer officers with him. The colonel's two horses and Yorke's were taken in a truck under the charge of Hans and the colonel's soldier servant. Trains of provisions and stores for Kimberley and Mafeking were being sent up rapidly, and depots formed at several points along the line. It had not been deemed prudent to send them very far until the plans of the Boers were apparent. The horse-box and the carriage in which the officers travelled were detached from the train at points that were considered important. Here they remained for a few hours, and were then attached to another train. While the colonel and his assistants examined the culverts and bridges, and made notes of their relative importance, Yorke made enquiries from British farmers as to the disposition of the Dutch population, and Hans resumed the clothes in which he had left the farm, and, under pretext of looking for a situation, entered into conversation with men of his own class.

The reports naturally varied a good deal. The opinion of the English colonists was that although the Dutch sympathies might be strongly with the Transvaal Boers, few of them were likely to take any active steps to join them, unless they

invaded the Colony in great force. Many of the young men, however, were missing, and it was generally believed that they had started to join their kinsmen in the Transvaal. Many of the better class of farmers who had been often at Cape Town, where not a few of them had received their education, were much better acquainted with the military power of Great Britain than were the mass of the Dutch population; and these, whatever their sympathies might be, were of opinion that in the long run her strength must overpower that of the Boers, and that an enormous amount of suffering and damage would result. They admitted that they themselves had nothing whatever to grumble at under the British flag, and acknowledged that the government of the Transvaal treated the Uitlander population there in a very different manner, and that had that government been ready to grant the same treatment to them as the Dutch of Cape Colony enjoyed, there would never have been any trouble.

"I think it all means," the colonel said one day when they were discussing the reports brought in, "that if we thrash the Boers the Colony will remain quiet; if they gain any big success, the greater portion of the Dutch here will join them. But no doubt there will be trouble in getting the trains through; it is impossible to guard such an enormous length of line. The utmost that can be done will be to have detachments posted at all the bridges whose destruction would cause serious delay. We can hardly doubt that rails will be pulled up and culverts destroyed, for this can be done by two or three men working at night. But of course each train going up will carry a few rails and a couple of balks of timber, tools, and three or four railway men, and the repairs can be executed with only a very short delay."

Four days after starting the party arrived at De Aar, which had been selected as the most favourable position as a base. At this place a line of railway from Port Elizabeth joined that from Cape Town. Seventy or eighty miles down the Port Elizabeth line were junctions at Naauwpoort and Mid-

delburg Road, the former with the main line running up through the Orange Free State to Pretoria and Pietersburg, the latter joining the line from East London at Stormberg, north of which was a branch to Aliwal North, and another crossing the Orange River at Bethulie, and joining the main Orange Free State line at Springfontein. Whatever might be the intention of the Dutch later on, so far there had been no attempts whatever to meddle with the railway. The waggon trains loaded with stores went up in rapid succession, and on their way met almost as many crowded with refugees from the Transvaal, the Free State, and Kimberley.

Miners and store-keepers, millionaires and mechanics, were closely packed, with little distinction of rank, and Yorke and his fellow-officers frequently expressed their disgust that so many able-bodied men should be flying, when on crossing the frontier they might well have gone to Kimberley, Colesberg, and other places to take part in the defence of the towns. The first blow had been struck. An armour-plated train going up to Mafeking had on the 12th been fired at with guns and derailed. Lieutenant Nesbit and the soldiers with him had defended themselves gallantly, but had at last been obliged to surrender. From Natal the telegrams were of a still more exciting nature. The invasion of that colony began a few hours before the ultimatum expired, and it was expected that the force under General Penn Symons would be attacked in the course of a day or two.

The Loyal North Lancashires had passed them the day after they started. Four companies had gone on to Kimberley, the rest had encamped at Orange River station.

Many mules and trek oxen had been sent up, and large numbers of Kaffirs, and the station at De Aar presented a busy scene. Wooden sheds had already been erected by the Engineers, and these were being filled with the more perishable articles, such as sugar and tea; stacks of bags of flour and mealies, and of cases of tinned meat, were rising in the open, while everywhere were piles of stores of all kinds lying just

where they had been thrown from the trucks on the sidings. An hour after Yorke's arrival the colonel was occupied in fixing on a site for a battery. This was selected on the top of a rising mound near the station, and from this the guns, when placed in position, would sweep the surrounding country. Tents were pitched for the party, and in these they speedily settled down.

"Now, Mr. Harberton," the colonel said that evening, "it does not seem to me that at present I have any occasion for your services here. We shall trace the lines of the fort to-morrow morning; a train with four hundred Kaffirs will arrive this evening, and we shall get to work by breakfast time. Then one officer and a couple of the sappers will be sufficient to look after them, while we shall attend to getting things in readiness for the arrival of more troops. So far the railway between this and Kimberley is still open, but it is certain that it will not be so for long. I think you can be most usefully employed in riding through Philipstown and Petrusville, and scouting between Zoutpans Drift and thence to Hondeblafs River and Colesberg Bridge.

"Between these places there is, so far as I know, no ford, and we may assume that if the Free State men cross in any strength it will be at one or other of these points; but small parties may possibly swim the river and attempt to cut the line north. At any rate, it is well that we should learn what is going on, and get early information of the movements of any of the enemy's parties. I am in hopes that no combined advance on their part will take place till we have got our guns mounted, for at present we are certainly not in a position to offer any serious resistance to an attacking force. Fortunately the Free State men are not as well prepared for a contest as the Transvaalers, and we know by the fugitives who have come down that very many of them are altogether opposed to Steyn's policy. Moreover, it is probable that they will direct their first effort against Kimberley; but it is as well to be forewarned.

"You can, of course, if you think proper, cross the Orange River in your Dutch disguise and gather news there. We can get very little reliable information from the fugitives, they seem to have swallowed every wild report in circulation; and if we were to credit their accounts we should believe that at least a hundred thousand Free Staters—that is to say, pretty nearly every adult male—were already under arms and on the march for the frontier. I have no faith whatever in such reports. I believe it far more likely that, as fast as they can be organized, a portion will march on Kimberley, but that their main force will go down through the passes in the Drakenberg to join the Transvaal force in Natal. That, I think, is the point upon which they are concentrating their attention at present, and they intend to sweep us out of that colony before they undertake any serious operations on this side. I think you may as well start in the morning."

CHAPTER V

SCOUTING

"I SUPPOSE you are feeling more comfortable, Hans," Yorke said as they cantered away from the camp on the following morning

"I don't know, Master Yorke; I was getting accustomed to the uniform, and these things feel a bit loose, as if I could shake myself out of them."

"I feel a good deal the same, Hans."

"And so you propose going to the Free State, master? I think it is just as well that Dirck Jansen is laid up with that wound you gave him; if he hadn't been, I am sure he would have mounted and ridden to join Steyn's men directly war was declared, and it would have been very bad if you had run against him."

"Very bad indeed, though I did not think of him at all. Yes, it is unfortunate now that I am known to so many of the Dutch farmers round Richmond and Brakpoort. I should say a good many of them will have joined the enemy. I don't suppose they ever noticed me very particularly, for I always kept out of the way as much as possible when they came, as I could not put up with their abuse of the English; still, some of them might recognize me. There is one thing, I always wore the shooting suits that I brought out from home; and these Dutch clothes I bought at Cape Town, when I knew the work I might have to do, have altered my appearance a good deal. I wish now that I had thought of buying three or four of those wisps of long hair that one sees in the hairdressers' shops there; if I had fastened them inside my hat, so as to fall down all round on to my shoulders, it would have altered my appearance, just as cutting your hair short has changed you. I should have looked like a rough young Dutch farmer from one of the country districts."

They rode on a little farther without speaking, and then he went on suddenly:

"I have an idea, Hans—our horses' tails are about the same colour. We might very well cut off about nine inches; that would give plenty of hair for our purpose. The only trouble would be fastening it into one's hat. We will stop at farmhouses as we go along, and when we get to an English settler's I will borrow a needle and thread from his wife. I will take out the inside lining of the hat, sew the hair in all round, except just in front, and then sew the lining on to it. That will keep it all tight."

Hans laughed.

"It will make you look very much like what I was before I visited the barber. No one would recognize you."

The third house at which they stopped they found to be an English settler's. As they rode to the door, they were in the usual hospitable way asked to come in and have something to eat.

"I am English like yourself," Yorke said, "and am serving as an officer with the force at De Aar, and I am going scouting to gather news of any movement on the other side of the Orange River. I may cross and go farther, but as I have been living for some time near Richmond, I may run against some of the rebel Dutch who have gone to join them, so I want to disguise myself."

"Come in, sir; we will do anything we can. When I saw you riding up, I certainly took you both at first for Dutchmen, but I see now that you are far more clean and fresh-looking than they generally are."

"Have many Dutch joined them from the colony?"

"Not so many about here; but farther on they say a good many have gone from Colesberg and that district. But most of them are waiting for the Boer advance, then I think the greater portion of them will join; from all I hear, it is an arranged thing, and the Boers reckon confidently on being joined everywhere by their own people. I am going to start to-morrow for De Aar, and shall sell all my cattle there, for if the Boers come, they will be sure to carry them all off. I hear the commissariat are buying them up for the use of the troops, and are giving fair prices for them, so I shall be no loser by it; and I shall sell my horses to them also. I have not got many sheep, but what I have I shall get rid of, then we will shut up the house, put the best part of our belongings into a waggon, and travel down quietly to Port Elizabeth, and wait there till the business is over, and if we find it likely to last, we shall go home for a holiday. It is fifteen years since we came out here, and we have been talking of going to see the old folk for some time, so if I get a fair price for the animals, it would suit us very well."

They were now in the house, and after taking a cup of coffee and some cold meat and bread, Yorke explained what he wanted. The colonist's wife was much amused at the idea, and undertook at once to do the sewing. Armed with a large pair of scissors, Yorke cut off about ten inches of the

horses' tails. While he had been doing this, the woman had cut the lining out from the hat. The horse-hair was then distributed equally round it, and she was about to begin sewing it in when her husband said: "Wait a bit, Jenny; I will put my glue-pot on the fire. The glue will hold the hair better than any amount of sewing, and if a bit happened to work out, it would look very awkward."

"That would be capital," Yorke said. "I had my doubts whether sewing would be sufficient, but there is no fear that glue will fail to hold."

Accordingly the glue was heated, and a band of it two inches wide laid on round the inside of the hat. Then the hair was pressed into this, and the lining sewn in its place again. Yorke put on the hat, and, looking in a glass, joined in the hearty laughter of Hans and the colonist. The appearance of the hair was perfectly natural, as it fell on to the collar of his coat in thick masses.

"It is capital," the man said. "I am sure no one would suspect that it was not real, except that, if they looked into it, they might think it was coarser than usual; but it is just the way many of the Boers wear their hair, and it certainly changes your appearance altogether. Your face might be all the better for being a little more dirty, but it is sunburnt, and will pass very well; only, you will have to bear in mind never to take off your hat."

"I think I shall remember that," Yorke replied. "The Dutch farmers seldom do take off their hats even indoors."

"I don't think that even Dirck Jansen would recognize you, Master Yorke," Hans said, "after always seeing you in what you call your Norfolk jacket and short gray breeches and stockings. He would not know even your figure. You used to look slim, but in that rough coat, fitting so loosely, your big trousers, and high boots, you look different altogether. I am sure that if I had met you, without knowing that you had disguised yourself, I should not have recognized you."

"You would look all the better for having your eyebrows

darkened a little," the woman said. "Your hair is much darker, and that would help to change your expression."

The farmer found a cork, and after burning it, darkened Yorke's eyebrows and eyelashes, thereby greatly altering the expression of his face.

"I will put that in my pocket," Yorke said, taking the cork, "then I can touch my eyebrows up from time to time as it wears off."

After many thanks to his host and hostess, he again mounted with Hans, and rode off, feeling confident now that he could mix with the Boers without fear of detection. Two days were spent in following the river on the line that he had been directed to take, and questioning the Kaffirs, of whom several bands were found living in little huts on its banks. They had seen no parties of men, nor, although news travelled fast among the natives, had they heard of any large gathering. On arriving at Zoutpans Drift they saw four Boers on the other side, evidently placed there as patrols. Yorke did not hesitate, but went boldly across.

"Where do you come from?" one of the men asked in Dutch, entertaining no doubt whatever that he was a young Boer farmer come to join.

"Our farm is a few miles from Richmond. I hope we are in time for the fighting. Has it begun yet?"

"Not here, though there have been a few shots fired round Kimberley. But a big force is going down by Van Reenans Pass to help Joubert drive the Rooineks into the sea."

"That is just the job I should like to join in."

"Well, I expect you will be in time. By now, no doubt, they will have finished with the Rooineks at Dundee. Then they will wipe out those at Ladysmith, and after that it will be an easy job, for there are no soldiers to speak of at Maritzburg. We shall make an end of them all this time, and it will be Africa for the Africanders, and no English allowed here. Another party will be crossing at Bethulie in a day or two. All our people in that district are ready to join as soon

as they do so; but there won't be any fighting there, for there are very few troops at Port Elizabeth, and I expect they will embark in their ships directly they hear that we are coming. What are they doing out your side?"

"Not much at present. I hear a talk that more troops are coming out; but it is a long way off, three weeks' voyage, I heard."

"As much as that?" the other said in surprise; "I thought England was close to the Cape. I am sorry to hear that, for I had made up my mind that after we had driven them out from here, we should go and take their country, just as they have tried to take ours; there would be good pickings for us all."

"Grand pickings," Yorke agreed.

"Well," the other went on, "I suppose we can get ships. France and Russia and Germany are all going to join us, and will be glad enough to arrange with us to send ships if we undertake to do the fighting."

"No doubt they will be glad to do so," Yorke said. "Though I am ready to fight, I do not think I should care for the voyage. They say that people who go on board ships for the first time are always ill."

"Well, we shall manage it somehow," the other answered.

"No doubt; but I must be riding on. I shall go on to Bloemfontein, and I fancy I shall join the Natal force rather than the Colesberg one. I am reckoned a good shot in my district, and it is no use having a rifle and bandolier if one is not going to use them."

So saying he touched his horse with his heel and rode off. Hans had been talking with the others.

"Why have you cut your hair off?" one asked.

"Because it will save trouble," Hans replied, "and besides it is cooler, and we shall have it hotter down in Natal than it is here; my hat, too, was rather tight, and it makes a lot of difference getting rid of your hair. If we had gone through Richmond, I might have got a bigger hat there, and let my

hair stay on. As it was, it was easier to cut it off and have done with it."

Yorke had told Hans to talk as much as possible, while he himself said no more than was necessary. No one could doubt for a moment that his follower was what he looked, and his being so would divert any suspicion from himself. They slept that night at Fauresmith. The little town was crowded with men who had come in in obedience to orders. After some difficulty they secured a room, and then went out and mingled in the throng. It was easy to see that there was considerable difference of opinion among the men. Some were noisy and boastful, but the majority were undoubtedly there against their will, and when these gathered quietly together angry words were spoken against Steyn, who had, without the consent of the great body of burghers, plunged the country into war and caused them to be dragged from their homes and families.

"We have no quarrel whatever with Britain," one said, "and she has never interfered with us in the slightest. Englishmen have always been welcome among us. We have nothing to do with the Transvaal quarrel. Why shouldn't the Uitlanders have a vote, as our people have in Natal and Cape Colony? Kruger has been working for it for years, and if—as he says, and those fellows who are shouting over there think—we can drive all the British out, it is the Transvaal people who will have all the power. We know how Kruger's gang has piled up money by monopolies. If the British go, it is we who will have to pay the taxes, and if there is to be any change, I would rather a thousand times come under British rule than under the Transvaal."

"You are right, Friedrich," another said. "If they had not said I should be shot if I did not come with them I should not be here to-day. They have taken my son as well as me, and who is to look after the farm while I am away?"

"Besides," another put in, "if we drive the British out,

who is going to keep stores? Where are we going to buy what we want? There is scarce a place that is not kept by an Uitlander. What do we know of such matters? Where are we going to buy the goods to fill the shops? Besides, it is not in our way. We are farmers and not shopkeepers. I consider it a bad business altogether, and there are many of us who would rather put a bullet into Steyn than into these Englishmen, who have done us no harm."

Yorke found that the commando was going on to Edenburg, then by train across the Orange River at Bethulie into Cape Colony, where, they were told, every Dutchman would join them, for, except in Colesberg and some other towns, there were very few English in the district. He gathered that all the other commandos in the district were to move in the same direction, while those to the north and west were to go to Kimberley. There was no talk whatever of any large body going west. As darkness came on, the streets began to empty, some of the men going into houses where they had obtained lodging, but the majority, wrapping themselves up, lay down by the side of their horses. Hans went into a store and bought some bread and cheese, for they had finished the things they had brought with them before they had crossed the river that morning.

"We will go back to-morrow the first thing," Yorke said when they had finished their meal in their room. "It is quite evident that they have no idea at present of any attack in force on De Aar. It will not do for us to cross at Zoutpans Drift; there would be no inventing a probable tale to account for our movements; and it will be a great waste of time to go down to Bethulie. There is the bridge near Colesberg, but that is a good bit out of our way, and very likely that will be guarded too. I was wrong not to have brought with me my English clothes, then I could have said that I was an English refugee from Bloemfontein, and there would have been no hindrance to our passing. As it is, I think we must make up our minds to swim the Orange River.

As we came along the banks there were several places where the land sloped gradually down to the water's edge on both sides. It was the case two or three miles below the drift, and we will make for that point. We can follow the road for some distance without much risk of meeting anyone, for it is evident that the greater portion of the men have been commandeered, and the few who remain will have plenty to do on the farms. If we should have the bad luck to fall in with some small party, I can give out that I am carrying orders from the field cornet for the men at the drift to be very watchful, and if a British force is seen on the other side they are to ride off at once and bring the news here, and then telegraph it to Bloemfontein. I do not know, by the way, whether that story would not pass us across the drift. I could say that the field cornet, whose name we luckily heard, said that we could do better service at present by crossing the drift and scouting on the other side than in going on, as there was not likely to be any fighting at present, especially as the train would certainly be so full at Edenburg that he would not be able to carry on his whole commando."

Hans nodded. "All right, Master Yorke! I would rather do that than swim the river, for I never swam a stroke in my life. I am told you can cross rivers like that by holding on by saddles or horses' tails, but I have no wish to try it."

"Well, we will start the first thing in the morning, before the Boers are about. They have not a very long march before them and are not to start till eight. We will be off at daylight."

Going downstairs he told the woman of the house that he would pay her at once as he had to be off early. The horses had been fastened up in a little yard at the back of the inn, and there would be no difficulty in getting them out. Matters turned out as Yorke had hoped. The town was still asleep when they started, and although they met two or three Boers riding at full gallop to join the commando on the march, these paid no attention to them. Fortunately, at the drift, the

men who had spoken to them the evening before had been relieved by others.

"Who are you, and where are you going?" one of the men asked.

Hans as usual acted as spokesman. "We are going scouting on the other side. Field Cornet Hatjens said that the train from Edenburg would not be able to carry all his commando, and that some will stop at Fauresmith for another day or two. As we said we wanted to be doing something, he ordered us to ride here and scout towards the railway, and see if any trains with Rooineks were going north, and especially if guards are stationed along the line. I don't suppose we shall find out much, but it will be something to do, and we shall have time, I expect, to join the others before they start. If we get any news it will be telegraphed from Fauresmith to Bloemfontein." Then, as if no further parley was necessary, they rode on into the water and were soon on the other side.

It was a long day's ride to De Aar, but they got there late in the evening, and Yorke went at once to the colonel's tent to report.

"Can I come in, sir?" he said as he reached the opening of the tent.

"Certainly, Harberton. Hullo!" he broke off as the light fell upon Yorke's face. "Why, what have you been doing to yourself? I recognized your voice at once, but if you had not spoken I certainly should not have known you."

Yorke took off his hat.

"A wig!" the colonel exclaimed. "Where on earth did you get hold of it?"

"It is horse-hair, sir," Yorke replied, handing him the hat to be examined. "I thought it possible that I might be recognized by some of the Dutch who knew me when I was at the farm, so I cut a good bit of hair off both of the horses' tails, and got an English colonist's wife to make the hat up as you see."

"An excellent plan," the colonel said, examining it. "Naturally it is coarser than it ought to be, but many of the Boers have very coarse hair, and the difference would not be observed in a casual inspection. It would certainly pass excellently after dark."

"It passed well yesterday at Fauresmith."

"At Fauresmith!" the officer repeated in surprise.

"Yes, sir. Finding that I could obtain no intelligence of any kind this side of the river, we crossed at Zoutpans Drift and went into Fauresmith, which was full of Dutch, a commando having assembled there. We mingled with them two or three hours and no one paid the slightest attention to us."

"You have done well indeed; but before you tell me what news you have gathered, I will point out to you that no doubt these men were all bent on discussing the work upon which they were going to be engaged, and would scarce give a casual glance at a stranger, and that although your hair might pass unnoticed there among them, it would hardly be so were you entering any place where you might be observed with suspicious attention. I think that the idea of a wig is an excellent one, and I should advise you to write down at once to Major Mackintosh, and ask him to go to the cleverest hair-dresser in Cape Town and get him to make a wig imitating the long hair worn by the Dutch. Say that it is of the utmost importance that it should be as indistinguishable from the real thing as possible, as your life might depend upon its being undetected. He had best send it up directed to me, as you might be away."

"I will do so, sir. I should not generally wear it, for most of the men I saw at Fauresmith had their hair quite as short as mine; many of them had almost a close crop. As we get farther north the chances of my meeting any of the men from round Richmond would grow smaller, so there would be no occasion to alter my appearance; and there would always be some danger of the wig going wrong. Still, I will certainly get one; it could be wrapped up very small, and if I should

get into a mess, and they were hunting for me, it would change my appearance altogether if I could slip it on."

"It certainly would do so; but I do not think that you will be called upon to go in disguise when we once move on. We shall, of course, then have scouting parties ahead, and we shall get information from the Kaffirs, and sometimes, perhaps, from well-disposed colonists. And now, please tell me all about your journey, and what you have discovered.

"That is most satisfactory news—most satisfactory. This is the most important point at present. There can be no doubt that in a day or two all communication with Kimberley will be cut off, and this place will become the base of our advance for its relief. An immense amount of stores must be collected here before we can move forward. No doubt small bodies of Boers will be hovering about, but they are not likely to make an attack; and indeed I doubt if any force could do so successfully. Still, it is a great thing not to be obliged to spend half our strength on erecting strong earthworks, and to feel that we can work in security. At the same time, I am sorry that they are evidently going to invade the colony south of the Orange River. From what I have heard, the Dutch population round Colesberg, Steynsburg, and Stormberg are likely to join them almost to a man. The country is mountainous, and it will be difficult to drive them out of it.

"Round Aliwal North a considerable portion of the population is British. They may be able to hold their own; but if they cannot do so, they are sure to suffer heavily at the hands of the Boers, who will certainly combine plunder with patriotism. Among them there are a considerable number of Irish and American Irish, Germans, French, and Hollanders, adventurers of the worst kind, whom high pay and the hope of plunder have attracted, together with a miscellaneous riff-raff of the lowest class from the mining centres. The country Boers will be rough and vindictive enough, you may be sure, but this foreign scum will be infinitely worse; still, I have no

doubt some of the troops as they arrive will be sent on to Port Elizabeth, and will, we may hope, be able to make head against them.

"By the way, we had news yesterday that Penn Symons had defeated them at Dundee, though with heavy loss on our side; he himself is mortally wounded. General White doubts whether that force will be able to maintain itself, as the Boers are closing in all round him, and the line of railway from Ladysmith is already cut. The Boers have a tremendous advantage in being all mounted men, and, living as they will do on the country they pass through, they will be unencumbered by supply trains, and will move three feet to our one. The more I see of it, the more I feel that we have a troublesome and difficult job on hand."

The letter to Major Mackintosh was at once written and sent off by the train starting that evening, together with one from the colonel, stating the information that he had gained —thanks to the daring and enterprise of Mr. Harberton, who had in disguise entered the Orange Free State and gathered the intelligence he now sent from the men of the Boer commando at Fauresmith.

Although Yorke had been absent but a few days, the changes at De Aar were wonderful. Never even in the days of the gold fever in California was so great a transformation effected in so short a time. De Aar had grown from a little village of some forty houses, two or three shops, a church and school, with a little camp, into a great military centre. Captain Mackenzie of the Royal Artillery was in charge of a separate camp, which grew daily. Here in a large kraal he had upwards of a thousand mules and as many horses, all of which had been broken in and trained for military service.

Not far away was the Army Service camp. Here were men capable of every kind of work that could be demanded— carpenters, wheelwrights, railway men, painters, plasterers, saddlers, and artificers of all sorts. Aided by Kaffirs working under their direction, camps and sheds were erected as if by

magic, and in a couple of days a street of corrugated iron stores would spring into existence on the veldt. There was already a medical camp, with its Red Cross flag. The Yorkshire regiment had come up, and was under canvas on the other side of the railway. The Kaffir camp was also a canvas town, and here natives of many tribes, Basutos, blacks from Cape Town, mule-drivers and transport men, were clothed and fed. Breastworks had been erected by the troops and Kaffirs upon the hills around, and redoubts thrown up on the plains.

On the morning after Yorke's return the colonel said to him: "I do not see any work to which I can put you here, Mr. Harberton. After what you have done I think you will be far more useful in scouting than in any other way. I have been thinking the matter over, and have come to the conclusion that you cannot do better than get some Kaffirs to act under you. I will give you an order on the head of their department to hand over a score of them to you. You can pick your men. They must, of course, be active and intelligent fellows; and although you speak a little of their language, it would be better to pick out some at any rate who understand English or Dutch. Your friend Grimstone, whose wife made your wig, has just come into camp with three or four hundred cattle and a number of horses and ponies. He is at present in the supply camp arranging the sale of his cattle. Some of his horses are too light for transport purposes, but they are, like the Basuto ponies, rough and hardy.

"Captain Mackenzie will no doubt buy all the animals suitable for his purpose, and I will walk across with you to his camp and get him to buy twenty ponies for your men. In this way you will be able to cover a considerable extent of ground, and give notice of any party of Boers who may ford the Orange River—for I hear that the water is sinking fast, and no doubt it can soon be crossed at many points besides the ordinary drifts. You would always be able to buy a sheep for the men, for although the English colonists are

rapidly coming in, of course the Dutch are remaining. The men must carry ten pounds of flour apiece; and if they have plenty of mutton it will last them for a week."

Yorke was delighted with the offer, indeed nothing could have suited him better; and after going with the colonel and arranging for the Kaffirs and ponies, he went to have a chat with his friend the colonist.

"I am glad to see that you got back safely," the latter said. "Did your disguise pass you all right?"

"Admirably. I went straight into the middle of a commando at Fauresmith, and learnt all that there was to learn without exciting the slightest suspicion. I hope you are doing well with your cattle."

"Excellently. I am getting a much better price for them than I could have obtained a month ago—more, indeed, than at the best of times; and I am told that all my heavy horses will be bought on good terms as remounts, but that the smaller ones are too light for this sort of work. I shall try and sell them to one of the Dutch farmers, but I can't expect to get much from them; in fact, I expect I shall almost have to give them away."

"Colonel Pinkerton has just made an arrangement by which you will get a fair price for twenty of them, if you have as many, for use by a score of Kaffirs who are to work under me as scouts. I don't suppose he will give you a high price for them; but at any rate he will pay you more than you would get from the Boers, who would know that you must take anything that they chose to offer."

"That is good news indeed. I am sure that I should not have got more than a pound a head for them, and they are worth from seven to ten pounds. If they will give me seven apiece all round I shall be delighted."

This was, indeed, the price that Yorke heard later in the day was paid for them.

On leaving Mr. Grimstone, Yorke went among the Kaffirs and picked out twenty active men, all of whom spoke Dutch.

They had all been clothed in blue frocks and trousers, and when they had been handed over to him he was well pleased with their serviceable appearance; in the afternoon he obtained the ponies from the remount department. The Kaffirs were in the highest glee at exchanging hard labour for work of a kind most congenial to them. Saddles were not necessary, nor were there any to spare, but Yorke obtained a couple of hides from the commissariat and the natives cut them into strips, folded up their blankets and placed them on the ponies' backs, using bands of raw hide as saddle-girths. With other strips they manufactured loops to act as stirrups, rough bridles, and reins.

"Now, Hans, I shall promote you to the position of sergeant," Yorke said that evening. "Your only duty will be to look after the fellows generally, to bargain with the farmers for food, and to see that the blacks obey orders when we are camping."

"Very well, Master Yorke, I will do my best. I shall be glad to be right away from this camp; the dust here is awful. And, having nothing to do while everyone else is at work, I quite long to be a Kaffir and do something."

"I did not know you were so fond of work, Hans."

"I didn't know that I was either," Hans said with a grin. "But one could always sleep at the farm when there was nothing else to do; it is too hot in these canvas tents for that, and when everyone else is at work I do not like to be loitering about all day. Already three or four officers have asked me who I was and what duty I was employed on, and seemed to think that I had no right to be here, and that I was of no use."

"Well, we shall have plenty to do for the next month, and, I hope, beyond that."

The heat and dust were indeed terrible at De Aar. The weather was trying and changeable, the sun was intensely hot, but a bitterly cold wind often blew. Sometimes a dust-storm would burst over the camp, covering everything with a thick

coat of red dust. This would be succeeded by a heavy thunder-shower.

The men drew their rations of flour the first thing in the morning, together with some bags of forage for the horses, and at seven o'clock Yorke and Hans mounted, and after ordering them to follow him four abreast, left the camp.

The Kaffirs needed no instruction from him in the art of scouting, it was born in their blood, and they had been taught as boys among their tribes, before they drifted away South as drivers of bullock-carts or in other capacities. Once there, and liking the life of loafing vagabondage, with just enough work to keep them from starving, they had remained until high wages were offered, and their instinctive love of warfare tempted them to take service with the army. Two miles away they were halted, and Yorke, who had bought Baden-Powell's book on scouting at Cape Town and had studied it diligently, told them that they were now to separate, and were to practise scouting among the low hills in front.

"You must bear in mind," he said, "that the great object is to discover the presence and strength of an enemy and the direction in which they are approaching, without letting them know that they are observed. You must never show yourselves against the line on the top of the hill, as, were you to stand up with the sky behind you, you could be seen for a very long distance. Half of you will go to the right and half to the left. I shall stop here for an hour and watch you at work; then I shall move straight forward. When you see me do so you will descend from the hills and join me as I pass between them. Some of you may be too far off to meet me there, but you will see our tracks and will follow us till you overtake us. You had better remain here with me, Hans, and watch them at work."

"I take it," Hans said, when the natives had started, "that scouting for an enemy is the same sort of thing as crawling up to a herd of deer, except that the deer are a good deal sharper than the men; you can approach men from either side, while

with deer you have not much chance to get near them unless the wind blows from them towards you."

"That is so, Hans. The Boers' eyesight is sharp enough, but they have not the power of smell. But if you were stalking them it would be best always to try to come up against the wind, for although they could not smell us, their horses might do so and show signs of uneasiness. Well, we have stalked a good many deer together, and I fancy it will help us a good deal with our work here."

Dismounting, he went with Hans on to an eminence and stood watching the Kaffirs through his field-glass. He saw that, as they passed the first small eminence, one man separated himself from the rest, rode up some distance, and then, leaving the horse, ran up until nearly at the top, when he threw himself down and crawled forward with a zigzag movement, taking advantage of the cover of rocks and sage-bushes. The next hill was wider and longer, and two or three men turned off; beyond that he could not perceive their movements. The same thing was going on on the other flank.

"They will do splendidly," Yorke said, turning to Hans. "But when they start scouting in earnest, and want to get up anywhere near the Boers, they will have to take off those blue clothes of theirs; their own skin won't show as much on the sand and rocks as those clothes will."

After waiting for an hour they mounted and rode slowly forward. They were joined as they passed through a dip in the sand-hills by five men from one flank and four from the other; there was not time for those who had gone farther to get back. The party rode on slowly, and were gradually overtaken by the others. All reported that they saw no signs of the enemy. They were again sent forward to search hills to the front, those who had before gone to the farther hills this time taking those nearer. So the work continued all day, and in the afternoon they halted at a deserted farmhouse, where they passed the night, four Kaffirs being thrown out as patrols. Yorke had no fear of being surprised,

but thought it as well to accustom the men to behave as if an enemy were near. For a week the work continued, being now carried on more in earnest, as they were near the river. As the colonel had suggested, their scouting was farther south than Yorke had before been.

"You know," he had said, "that there is no idea at present of their crossing the Orange River between Zoutpans Drift and Philippolis, so you had better watch the line between Seacow River at its junction with the Orange to Hanover, as it is across this line that bands that had crossed at Bethulie Bridge or Norvals Pont into Cape Colony might advance west to cut the railway between De Aar and Richmond Road station."

The country was very hilly here, and the Kaffirs were divided into parties of two, each having his appointed station. One was always to remain at the look-out, the second to scout down to the river, and, when required, to fetch provisions from the farmhouse, which served as Yorke's head-quarters.

CHAPTER VI

THE ADVANCE

THE work was carried on steadily. The Kaffirs used their ponies only to carry them to the point at which they commenced work. Here they would be left while the natives proceeded on foot, scouted all day, returning to their mounts late in the afternoon, and generally arriving at the farm as the evening was closing in. For this work they had entirely given up the clothes with which they had been furnished, and went about in the scanty attire worn by Kaffir boys on a farm, or in the ragged garments in which they had been engaged. Thus they were able to obtain information from the Kaffirs at the farms, pretending either to have come from the little native communities settled on the river bank, or to have left the

Orange Free State because of the troubles, and to be on the look-out for work.

All that could be learned, however, was that the Boers who had crossed the Orange River were either making south through the mountainous district near Stormberg and Steynsburg, or were moving towards Aliwal North. They were being largely joined by Dutch sympathizers, and the farms of the British settlers were being everywhere looted.

After a fortnight of this work, Yorke was recalled to De Aar. The troops from England had been pouring through. The first skirmish had taken place. The mounted infantry of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Northumberland Fusiliers, and the North Lancashire, with the 9th Lancers, seven hundred in all, had gone some twenty miles along the railway to the Orange River Station, and come in contact with a strong Boer commando. There was a skirmish, two officers were killed, and two others and two privates wounded.

Already guns, waggons, the soldiers' belts, and even their guns had been painted khaki to match the uniforms. The officers, too, were in khaki, but the emblems of their rank, and above all, their swords, had marked them out, and the Boer sharp-shooters directed their attention specially to them.

"You are to go up at once to Orange River station," the colonel said. "I spoke about you and your little corps of Kaffir scouts to Lord Methuen as he passed through here yesterday. He has already a body of two hundred mounted colonials for scouting work; but on my pointing out to him that your Kaffirs could pass anywhere, and obtain information from their countrymen in the heart of the enemy's country without exciting suspicion, he said the idea was an excellent one, and ordered me to send you on at once. You will report yourself to him personally on your arrival at Orange River. You must go by road; the railway is entirely occupied by the troops going up."

Delighted at the order, Yorke, after an hour's halt to rest the ponies and draw rations, started, and rode as far as Hout

Kraal siding. There he halted for the night, and the third day rode into Orange River station at twelve o'clock. He had no difficulty in finding Lord Methuen's quarters. The general, a handsome soldierly man, was standing at the door speaking to an officer, and when the conversation ended, Yorke moved up and saluted.

"My name is Harberton, sir. On arriving at De Aar yesterday, Colonel Pinkerton ordered me to come on here and report myself to you."

"Ah! you are the officer in command of a party of Kaffir scouts. He spoke highly of you, and said that you had crossed the Orange River in disguise and obtained valuable information from a Boer commando you mixed with. It certainly seemed to me that you and your men might do valuable service. Our scouts can only tell us what they see, whereas your Kaffirs can go anywhere and obtain information from the natives, while your speaking Dutch will enable you to pass as a Boer. You yourself know something of Kaffir also?"

"Yes, sir."

"They have horses?"

"Yes, sir; but they only use them till they get to a point where they really begin to scout. Then they knee-halter them and start on foot, and are absent perhaps many hours before they return. The ponies enable them to cover a much larger extent of ground than they could were they to start in the first place on foot."

The general nodded. "We shall not start for another three or four days, Mr. Harberton, but I shall be glad if you will be off to-morrow morning on a reconnaissance. The other day the Boers were not met with on this side of Belmont; I wish to ascertain whether the country is still completely clear of them to that point, and if possible, what force they have at Belmont. You will report yourself now to the quartermaster-general, who will assign you a tent and a spot where your Kaffirs can picket their ponies. They had better not take them with them to-morrow, as they would be

much more conspicuous to the Boer scouts than if the men went on foot. You may as well, by the way, take four horses on to the point where you yourself decide to stop. Your men will, of course, return to you every evening, and you will send one off each day with your report of what you have learned. A week's rations will be issued to you. Oh, here is Major Rimington!

"Major," he said, as the officer came up, "this is Mr. Harberton, who commands a small body of Kaffir scouts, who will be more useful in obtaining information than your men can be, as they can pass anywhere and pick up news from the local Kaffirs. He will be generally away, but as he is quite alone, I shall be glad if you will allow him to be attached to your corps while he is with us. He has already made one dangerous expedition in disguise. He is, I hear, an old Rugby boy, but has been out here long enough to speak Dutch fairly and to talk a little Kaffir."

"With pleasure, sir. We will make him at home and look after him. If you will wait a few minutes, sir, while I speak to the general, I will take you off with me."

Saluting Lord Methuen, Yorke walked away a short distance greatly pleased with his reception. He was soon joined by Major Rimington.

"Now, have you anywhere to go before you come to our camp?" the latter asked.

"I have to go to the quartermaster-general's to get him to assign a spot where the ponies of my men can be picketed, and to obtain an order for them and myself for a week's rations, as we start out to-morrow, and also to get a tent."

"It will be of no use your getting that till you come back; we are not very closely packed. Anyhow, you can have a shake-down for the night. When we once move forward there will be no coming back here, and it would be absurd to have all the trouble of getting a tent and putting it up, and taking it down and handing it over the next morning. Have you a servant?"

"Yes, sir. I have a Dutch lad, a very good fellow, who acts as my servant and sergeant."

"Then he had better draw his rations and yours, and look after you. I shall be glad if you will share my tent for to-night."

The arrangements were soon made, and the quartermaster-general also gave an order on the officer looking after the native labourers, to tell off two Kaffirs to take care of the horses of the party until they returned. Then Yorke went with Major Rimington to the camp of his regiment, and was introduced to his officers. Two or three of these were already acquainted with Yorke, having lived at the same hotel at Cape Town.

"You are just in time for lunch," the major said. "I do not expect we shall get any more regular meals for some time."

They sat down in the open air at a rough table constructed of planks placed on empty barrels, and boxes, the latter being also used for seats. The meal was a pleasant one; everyone was in high spirits at the thought that the period of inaction was nearly over, and that in a few days they would be advancing to the relief of Kimberley. There was no stint of food, as, in addition to the ordinary rations, they had brought up with them two or three cases of preserved meats and wine, and as these could be taken on no farther there was no motive for being saving with them. The officers were a fine set of young men. All were colonials of good family, and the men were all strong and hardy young fellows. They were to act not only as scouts, but as guides to the army, and there was scarcely a square mile in the colony but was known to one or other of them. Unlike the regulars, the officers had already done away with everything that would distinguish them at a distance from privates, their belts were khaki colour, and they carried carbines instead of swords, in addition to their revolvers.

After the meal was over, the party broke up, the officers going to look after the men and horses. The major said:

"Come into my tent, Harberton, and tell me how you come to speak Dutch so well, and how you got up this corps of yours."

The major lit his pipe and seated himself on a box, which —with the exception of a bed on the ground, two other boxes which served as a writing-table, and another kept for a visitor—constituted the sole furniture of the tent. Yorke took the spare box, and gave a sketch of his history and doings to the major.

"You have done well indeed," the latter said when he had finished. "It was a thousand times better to come out here and fight your way, than to be hanging about waiting for something to turn up at home, and you have certainly made the best of your time. Many men would be years in the colony before learning to speak Dutch thoroughly. Your expedition to Fauresmith shows that you have plenty of intelligence as well as pluck, though, looking at you now, I can hardly fancy you would be able to disguise yourself to pass as a Boer."

"I shall start in that character to-morrow morning, Major, so you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself. I have no idea of stopping idle all day while the Kaffirs are at work."

"Don't be too rash, you know," the major said. "Remember that a man may do a thing half a dozen times in safety, but at the seventh some accident may occur that will betray him."

That afternoon Yorke saw a party of troopers ride in with six Boers; they had been captured in a skirmish. Two of these were men of a better class, with well-made clothes, silk neck-ties, and polished boots; the others were rough fellows, probably, he thought, men employed on some of the farms belonging to the others. He noticed that these had all cut their hair, so that it stood up rough and bristly.

"That is good," he said to himself. "I shall be able to do without that wig that the colonel handed to me when

I returned to De Aar. I don't say that it might not come in useful if I had to change my disguise quickly, but it would always be dangerous. Hat and wig might both blow off in one of the thunder-storms, or get knocked off in a scuffle. Still, I am afraid I shall look too English without it. Of course there are boys of my age among them. We know that all over sixteen have to go on commando. However, I will first go into the major's tent and slip into my Boer clothes, and put on my wig and blacken my eyebrows, and see if he recognizes me, then I will ask his opinion how I could alter myself a bit if I gave up the wig."

He returned to the camp of Rimington's Tigers, as they were generally called—from the fact that they wore a strip of raccoon skin as a band round their slouched hats. When he had put on his disguise, he waited till he heard Major Rimington ride up and call to his orderly to take his horse, then he stepped out.

"Hullo! Who the deuce are you?" the major exclaimed; "and how dare you enter my tent when I am away? What are you doing in the camp, sir? Show me your permit."

"I did not know anything about a permit," Yorke said in Dutch, disguising his voice as much as possible.

"How was it the sentry let you enter the camp?" the major said angrily.

"Hi, there!" he called to two of his men a little distance away. "Hi, hand this man over to the guard, and tell the sentry to keep a sharp eye upon him. I expect he is a spy, and by his going into my tent possibly a thief."

"You needn't do that, major," Yorke said as he answered him in English with a laugh. "You see I have been able to pass as a Boer, and even you, seeing me come out of your tent, did not recognize me."

The major broke into a laugh, telling the soldiers who were running up that it was all right, and they need not trouble themselves. Then, as he alighted, he took another good look at Yorke. "No, I certainly should not have known you. It

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YORKE SURPRISES THE MAJOR

is a wonderfully good get-up. That long hair changes your appearance completely, and those loose slovenly clothes quite alter your figure. You will be able to pass anywhere like that. Come in; let me see what you have done to your face. Even that seems changed somehow."

"It is only that I have darkened my eyebrows, sir."

"Where did you get that wig from?" he went on as Yorke, on entering, took off his hat.

"I sent down from De Aar, and had it specially made."

"It is a capital one, and that sort of rough curl on the forehead completely hides the edge of the parting."

Yorke spent a pleasant evening with the officers of the Tigers, and started soon after daybreak next morning, wearing his uniform, the bundle containing his other clothes being carried on one of the four horses ridden by the Kaffirs.

They attracted no notice whatever in passing through the camp, but at the bridge Yorke had to show the pass he had received from the quartermaster-general on the previous day, ordering that he should at all times be allowed to leave or enter the camp, and enjoining all officers of patrols and detached parties to render him any assistance in their power. Once across the bridge he rode on at a trot, the unmounted natives keeping up without difficulty. He did not follow the line of the railway, but struck off to the right, as any Boers who might be on look-out on the top of the kopjes would be watching the line, which was frequently patrolled for some miles from the camp, in order to prevent it from being torn up or injured. The country on this side of the river was greener and less arid-looking than on the plains south of it.

Riding east for three or four miles across undulating and broken ground, Yorke felt that he had probably got beyond the hills where watchers were likely to be stationed. He and Hans now dismounted, took off their uniforms, and dressed themselves in Boer attire. The Kaffirs were told to scatter, and made their way as much as possible over rocky ground, keeping the mounted party in sight. Half a dozen of them

went ahead, ascending every elevation whence they could get a view of the country round and discover any Boers on watch. They were now travelling parallel with the railway, and continued that course until, as Yorke judged, they must be nearly abreast of Belmont. A spot was chosen in a narrow valley between two kopjes. It was thickly strewn with great boulders and rocks of all sizes. Here the Kaffirs at once set to work to build up a rough wall where a huge overhanging mass of rock formed a natural roof. The six horses were given a good feed, and were then allowed to wander about and nibble the grass and the leaves of the bushes growing thickly between the rocks.

Yorke and Hans took possession of the rough shelter, and rations were served out. With the tinned meat and a handful or two of mealies the Kaffirs were well content, and as the clouds were banking up for a thunder-storm, soon found shelter for themselves among the boulders. The storm came up rapidly; the thunder was incessant for half an hour, then the sky cleared up and the stars shone out. Yorke had procured a stock of bread for himself and Hans, extra water-bottles had been brought, and as Major Rimington had insisted upon his taking two bottles of wine before starting, they made a comfortable meal.

"I thought you did not drink anything but tea and coffee, Master Yorke," Hans said, when the latter poured a little wine into the water in a tin mug.

"I do not as a general thing, Hans, but I cannot get tea or coffee at present, and the water of the Orange River is scarcely a fluid that it is desirable to drink alone. Spirits I never touch, but a spoonful or two of wine takes away the muddy flavour and helps one to get down this bread and tinned meat. Using it like this, the wine will last for a week, and I expect before that time we shall join the troops at Belmont. Hans, you must mind you have your story perfect. We are Dutch from Cape Colony. We crossed the river at Colesberg Bridge, and decided to come north to join Cronje

outside Kimberley. Of course we must be very careful as to where we say we live. It is pretty certain that a good many of the Dutch from round Richmond will have come to aid the Free Staters. I know by sight those who used to come to the farm; no doubt you know more. They won't recognize us in our changed dress, but they would know the names of all the farmers for many miles round, and it would never do to say that we came from that part of the country.

"We had better say that we came from near Pearston. It is a good-sized place in the East Somerset district, about half-way between the two lines going up from the coast to Middelburg. It is very unlikely that any of the Dutch from that neighbourhood would come up here; they will be waiting for the Boers to come down across the Orange River through Steynsburg and Molteno, before they take up arms, so that there will be very little fear of our falling in with any who would question us very closely as to the farm we came from or of the people we knew. But I do not propose to go in among the enemy at Belmont. It is almost certain that, although they may fight there, and perhaps at some of the kopjes farther on, it is at the crossing of the Modder river that the big fight will be.

"Every time we went into their camp the risk would increase. Some of the men who saw us at one place and heard our story would be sure to recognize us at the next. Of course if we remained with them all the time, shared in the fighting and retreat, it would be all right; but I have not the least idea of being shot by our own men or cut down in the pursuit, for there would be no time to explain to a Lancer coming right at you that you were an Englishman holding an authorization from Lord Methuen. So I shall content myself this time with telling off four of the Kaffirs. They are to make their way separately to Belmont, to get into conversation with Kaffir drivers, teamsters, and so on, and to endeavour to find out about how many Boers are assembled there, what guns they have with them, whether there is any

talk of their being joined by a larger force, and whether they know of any place farther on where they intend fighting.

"If they are questioned at Belmont they can tell any story they like. They can say that they were working for English settlers, and that as these have left, they are out of employment and want a job. They must arrange among themselves where to meet at night, then, after comparing notes as to what they have learned, one of them must steal away and make his way back here. The other three, if they have been hired to look after ponies, had better remain there, and retire with the Boers if they retreat. The next day I will send off another to act exactly in the same way, so that every night I shall get a messenger back. The men not engaged in this work will scout all the country round, visiting farms and asking for work, and finding out whether any more men are coming from the east through Fauresmith, and if there are any bands about who are likely to be making down to cut the line this side of Belmont. You and I will scout along this line of hills, there may be some parties lurking among them with the intention of damaging the line."

The next morning at daybreak Yorke informed the Kaffirs of the work they were to do, and chose four of them as the first to carry out his plan, and explained fully to them the manner in which they should proceed and the story they were to tell.

"You had better draw lots at once," he said, "which of you is to bring me the news that you have gathered. Don't all tell the same story. Two of you can go in together and can pretend you have come from a deserted farm, the other two had better say they have come from one of the little native collections of huts by the river. Where there are Boers there are sure to be waggons, and it is probable that some of the native drivers will have deserted, and the Boers will be glad to take on fresh hands. It is not at all probable that any of you will be exposed to fire, the waggons are sure to be sent off as soon as the troops are seen to be advancing."

In a few minutes the whole party had scattered with the exception of three men left to look after the horses. Yorke and Hans spent the day in hard work, climbing up to the summit of the highest kopje, whence they commanded a view over the lower hills near the line of railway. The closest examination through a field-glass failed to show that there was any force stationed on them, though on several, single figures could be made out, evidently posted there as scouts. At dusk, all save the four who had gone into Belmont had returned. They brought no news of importance. The Kaffirs they had fallen in with, when questioned, had heard nothing of any further commandos coming in from the east. They stated that it was believed that great numbers had assembled behind the Modder, and that they were digging trenches and throwing up breast-works on their side of the river, and the general talk was that they would annihilate the English army when it arrived there.

The Boers were disappointed that Kimberley had not already been captured. Everywhere the feeling of the Kaffirs was in favour of the British, but all believed that these had no chance whatever against the Boers. Yorke had brought candles and writing materials with him, and at once sat down and wrote his report of the news.

Three hours later one of the men returned from Belmont. His report was that many of the Boers had been there for upwards of a month, that the kopjes had all been fortified by walls of rough stones round the summits, and that these had been continuously occupied by the lower class of Boer labourers and cattlemen. The Kaffirs are not good at figures, but by careful cross-examination Yorke gained the information that there were more men there than would make two of the regiments they had seen at Orange River. They said that more would move up from behind when the British advance began, and that the leaders and the richer Boers would then arrive in their Cape carts or on horseback. The Boers felt confident that the British would never be able to storm their kopjes.

These kopjes were isolated hills, apparently composed of rough boulders, the rock from which they were formed rising sharply above them. About Belmont they were seldom more than five hundred feet high, but in many cases they rose fully three times that height, and it was up two of these lofty crests that Yorke and Hans that day laboriously climbed.

As soon as Yorke had written down the information he had gathered, he despatched one of the men with the horses to ride back with it to Orange River. Yorke instructed the man that when challenged he was to reply, "A friend with despatches"; then he was to stand still till the sentry called to a sergeant, who would send forward two men to conduct him to the proper authorities, who would pass him on to head-quarters.

Three days were passed at the same work, then one of the messengers brought back an order for Yorke to join the troops on the following evening at Fincham's Farm, half-way to Belmont. The troops would halt there for the night, and advance to the attack on the following morning. It was from Fincham's Farm that Yorke had obtained water for the men and horses. Five of the Kaffirs had been down there every day, in charge of Hans, with the horses, to give the animals a good drink and fill the men's water-bottles, there being no water to be had nearer. Yorke was glad to receive the order, for after the first day the news from Belmont had varied but little. Some fresh parties of Boers had arrived, but not in any great number; and although it was believed that a stand could be successfully made at Belmont, it was intended that the great, and, as expected, final blow was to be struck at Magersfontein.

The party started early, and reconnoitred all the hills on the way down. Late in the afternoon a cloud of dust was seen out on the plain. No moving figures could be made out. It might have been a sand-storm, such as sprang up nearly every afternoon, but Yorke had no doubt that it was the army, with its waggons and baggage. When he rode into Fincham's

Farm he found Rimington's Guides and the Lancers already there, and half an hour later the head of the column marched in. Their figures could scarcely be made out until they were within a few hundred yards of the place, so completely did the universal khaki disappear in the cloud of dust they raised on the arid plain over which they were marching. Yorke and Hans had resumed their uniforms, and the former received a hearty greeting from Rimington and his officers.

"How have you got on, Harberton?" the major asked cheerily.

"It's been hard work, and by no means exciting, sir. I am afraid that such news as I have sent in has been of no great use to the general."

"Yes, I think it has been useful. I saw the quartermaster-general yesterday, and he said that your scouts were doing very well, better than he anticipated. Thank goodness, work is going to begin at last! And so you think there will be no stand made by the Boers until we get to Belmont?"

"I am convinced of that. The Kaffirs have searched every kopje up to that point. Beyond a vedette or two on some of the hills, they have no force whatever along the line of railway this side of Belmont; but they have a strong body there —from two thousand to two thousand five hundred. As far as I can make out they have a few guns also. I got near enough to make out with my glasses that they were at work on three hills from four to five miles east of the station. Their guns are on the two hills farthest east."

"And what is the ground like behind? Will it give us any chance of acting on their line of retreat?"

"The ground is very rough and broken behind the centre, and there is a big range of hills—not kopjes—still farther behind. To their right is some flat ground where the cavalry could act, but they would have to pass through a line of smaller kopjes forming a continuation of the three principal ones. There were no men on these when I was watching them yesterday; but if they should retreat across the plain,

a small body of them placed there could check the advance, if not stop it altogether."

"Then, if I understand you, Harberton," the major said, examining the leaf of the pocket-book on which Yorke had roughly dotted down the positions, "we could move along the line of railway without the Boers being able to trouble us from the position they occupy?"

"Certainly, major; but of course they would be able to come down behind us directly we pass, and attack the baggage-train. Being all mounted men, they could move very fast."

"Yes, I see that they might give us a lot of trouble, and I should think Lord Methuen would clear them out before we go farther."

Yorke reported himself to the quartermaster-general, and he was told to wait, as the general might wish to question him further; indeed, five minutes later he was sent for. The general had only dismounted a few minutes before, and was now in a room in the farmhouse. He had before him the rough sketch of the Boer position that Yorke had sent in on the previous evening.

"The information you have gathered is valuable, Mr. Harberton, and, rough as the sketch is, it has given us a better idea of the Boer position than we had previously been able to gather from the maps. Do I understand you to say that if the Boers were prevented from making off across this level ground to the right rear of the position, they would be thrown back across this line of high hills which is marked in my map as Mont Blanc?"

"Yes, sir. I went up to the highest point of those hills, and so far as I could see they would have to go by a road that runs round the foot of the mountain to the south-east. That road might be cut by a cavalry force making its way round to the south of the three kopjes from Witputs station."

"And what is the length of front along these three kopjes at present held by them?"

"I should say from five to six miles, sir. It is about as far from the right-hand kopje to Belmont station; the left or southern kopje is a good deal farther from the line of railway."

"They have erected breast-works on the hill?"

"Yes, sir; rough barricades of rocks and boulders. Their horses are gathered on the low ground behind the kopjes."

"You do not think they will fall back at our approach?"

"I should not think they would, sir. My Kaffirs say that they all think it absolutely impossible for the troops to scale the hills in the teeth of their rifle fire."

"Thank you, sir! You are attached for the present to Rimington's Guides, are you not? You had better continue with them until your Kaffirs can get to work again. You still have some among the Boers, have you not?"

"Yes, six have obtained employment with them. My instructions were that they were to retire with them, and that every night one or other should make off and bring in news of what they were doing. I said they were to come in the first place to Major Rimington, as I should probably be there."

The general nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Harberton! your arrangements have been very good."

The next morning the column advanced to a farm on the road on the western side of the railway two miles from Belmont. The movements for an attack on the following day were at once begun. The Ninth Brigade—consisting of the Northampton Regiment, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, four companies of the Loyal North Lancashire, and two companies of the 1st Royal Munsters—passed the station, and took up their position to the north of it. The three regiments of Guards halted at a house known as the White House, some four miles short of the station. The Naval Brigade had just come up after a tremendous march. A portion of the cavalry went on to the town of Belmont—it was nearly three miles beyond the station—while a portion remained at Witputs station.

Unfortunately in this arm the force was extremely weak, the cavalry consisting only of some two hundred and fifty 9th Lancers and Rimington's Guides. It had with it the 18th and 75th Batteries of Field Artillery, and numbered, in all, ten thousand infantry and artillery, and five hundred sailors.

Orders were issued for the troops to be under arms and ready to move at three in the morning. From a gun visible on the crest of the third kopje this was called Gun Hill, the northern was christened Table Hill, and the southern was locally known as Kaffir Kop. The Guards were to march against Gun Hill. The Naval Brigade were to cover the right of the Guards from any attack by the Boer force from Kaffir Kop. The Northumberlands and Northamptons were to attack Table Hill, while the other regiments of the brigade were to form a connecting link between them and the Guards. It was clear from these instructions that, as Kaffir Kop was not to be attacked, Lord Methuen's plan was to throw back the Boer right, and force it in its retreat to move by the road south of Mont Blanc, and so sever it altogether from the Boer forces farther north. That complete success did not attend the operation was due to the difficulty of moving in the dark across an unknown country.

CHAPTER VII

BELMONT, GRASPAN, AND THE MODDER

IT was a bright moonlight night when the men set out on their march. Orders had been issued that absolute silence was to prevail, that no matches were to be struck, that orders were to be delivered by signs and not by word of command, and that at each halt the men were to kneel down. The ground was undulating, and wherever it was possible the column took advantage of the shadows thrown by

the rising ground. The sight of these bodies of men moving almost without sound across the sandy soil, on which their feet fell noiselessly, was almost weird. Occasionally there came a deep rumble of wheels as the guns passed over a piece of rocky ground, and a murmur of annoyance could be heard in the column, for all knew how important it was that they should get as near as possible to the Boer position unheard.

The Grenadiers led the way in the right column, the Scots Guards were on their left rear, the two battalions of Coldstreams were in reserve. Unfortunately these positions were not maintained. The Scots Guards came up abreast of the Grenadiers but some distance to their left; the Grenadiers, instead of maintaining their direction, bore to the left and marched against Kaffir Kop; the Coldstreams diverged still farther to the left; thus, instead of being concentrated for the attack on the central kopje, the brigade were scattered over a front of two miles. No doubt the efforts of the various battalions to find out each others' position delayed the advance, and they did not arrive until day had broken. The sun was just rising over the eastern hills when the Grenadiers came within three hundred yards of the foot of Kaffir Kop. Suddenly some guns placed on an eminence to its right opened fire, and at once a roar of musketry came from the top of the hill, while a heavy flanking fire also opened from Gun Hill, and a storm of bullets swept the line, many men falling at once, while the dust rose thickly around them as the Mauser bullets pattered fast on the sand. The order had been given that the troops were not to fire, but were to carry the hill at the point of the bayonet.

The pause was a short one. Joined by some of the Northamptons, who apparently had also missed their way, the Grenadiers fought their way up the hill. The Boers here, as at Talana, on the other side, lost heart as soon as they found to their astonishment that, in spite of their tremendous fire, the troops whom they had despised still pressed up the

hill. They did not await their arrival at the crest, but fled precipitately down into the valley behind it, and took up a fresh position on another hill there. While the Grenadiers had been engaged in this short but desperate conflict, the Scots Guards on their left had effected the capture of the central kopje. They rushed to the attack as bravely as their brothers-in-arms. The Boers on the summit had opened as hot a fire upon their assailants as had the defenders of Kaffir Kop, but the troops were not exposed to such a terrible cross-fire, and the consequence was, their loss was comparatively small.

On the left the fighting had been sharp. The enemy had thrown out outposts towards the railway from Table Hill, and the Northamptons were soon engaged in driving them in. At the foot of the hill, however, the Boers made a stand. They had thrown up some stone breast-works, and held them until the Northamptons pushed forward to the right and so took the defenders of the sangars in flank, and forced them to quit their position and retire to the hill. The two regiments then advanced to storm the position. The defence of the Boers here was more feeble and half-hearted than that offered at Gun Hill and Kaffir Kop. On gaining the summit the infantry halted until the guns came up and opened fire on the next range of hills, where the Boers, driven from their first line of defences, had now ensconced themselves, keeping up a continuous fire from among the rocks. Two regiments advanced and seized a ridge to the south, from which the Boers had been maintaining a flanking fire; but they could advance no farther, for the Yorkshires and Munsters, who should have been their supports, had been withdrawn.

This was an unfortunate tactical error. Had they been with their brigade, and had this been strengthened by one of the Coldstream battalions, our left could have pressed steadily on and have driven the Boers by the south-east route, where they would have been harassed as they passed by the fire of the Guards Brigade, and cut up by the little body of cavalry that had arrived there from Witputs. The

Coldstreams came late into action, but they attacked and carried the hill called Mont Blanc, while they aided the Scots Guards to capture another eminence to the south of that hill. They were aided by the artillery and by the guns of the Naval Brigade, which now, after tremendous efforts by the marines and sailors, had been brought up.

The enemy, disheartened at the manner in which they had been driven from position after position, now gave way altogether. Their only means of retreat was to cross the level ground to the north-east, and had there been a strong force of cavalry, with a battery or two of horse-artillery, under Lord Methuen's orders, their defeat would have been converted into a disastrous rout. But half of the little force were on the other flank, there was no horse-artillery, and although the little party of Lancers and Rimington's Guides attempted to perform the work assigned to them, they were unable to do so. The broken ground running north from Table Hill was held by a strong body of Boers, who covered the retreat of their waggons and guns. In no case could they have overtaken the flying horsemen, for their chargers were worn out by the heavy work of scouting they had carried on. Water, too, had been short since they had left the Orange River, and after suffering a good many casualties they fell back. The battle was virtually over by six o'clock, having lasted about two hours.

Yorke had ridden with Rimington's Guides from Belmont, and, as they were on the extreme left of the fighting-line, had seen little indeed of the combat. That the British were gaining ground was evident from the direction from which the roar of battle reached them, and when at length the order came for them to advance, they had ridden forward eagerly until checked by the heavy fire opened from the low line of rocky eminences facing them. To have pressed on against riflemen hidden among rocks would have been to incur certain and heavy loss, and might have deprived the army of its already utterly insufficient cavalry force; consequently Colonel

Gough, who was in command, reluctantly gave the order for them to retire. Yorke had the evening before handed over his Kaffirs to the medical department as stretcher-bearers, and as soon as firing ceased and it was evident that the battle was over, he rode across the country to give what aid he could in the work.

He found that the greater part of the British wounded had already been carried off by the troops, some in the ambulance waggons, some on stretchers. By half-past ten the infantry were already in camp, and by one all the wounded were being attended to in the hospitals. The loss of the Grenadiers, 117 men killed or wounded and 10 officers, exceeded that suffered by the whole of the rest of the division. The Northumberlands and Northamptons had over 60 casualties among the men and 6 among their officers; of these the Northumberlands had by far the larger share. Yorke, after seeing the last of the wounded, Briton and Boer, placed on ambulances, was now free, and, fastening his horse to a sage-bush, he and Hans ascended the hill the Grenadiers had won.

On reaching the summit he saw that it had been carefully prepared for defence, and had evidently been occupied for a long time. The wall was not, as it had appeared, continuous, but was broken up into little enclosures or forts, each sufficiently large for two or three men to live and sleep in; straw, old sacking, and brushwood formed the beds. In each were generally to be seen the ashes of a fire, a cooking-pot, meat-tins, fragments of bread, and other signs of continued occupation.

Empty cartridge-cases littered the ground everywhere, while many still loaded showed how hasty had been the flight of the Boers. Several dead bodies lay in these little forts; they were for the most part of men of the lower class, farm-servants and others, with rough ill-fitting clothes and closely-cropped heads. Among them, however, were a few of a very much superior class, clean and carefully dressed, but these were quite the exception; and Yorke afterwards heard from the prisoners that men of that class generally sent on their best horses, and

rode in on spare animals or in light carriages and carts, and as soon as they saw that the fight was going against them, ran down the hill, jumped on to their fresh horses, and rode off, leaving the unmounted men to fight and die. Eighty-three Boers were found dead, but it was certain that the bodies of many of the better-class Boers had been carried off when they fell. More than fifty prisoners were taken, and twenty wounded; sixty-four waggons and a considerable number of horses were captured.

The next day all the wounded were sent down by train. That afternoon the troops moved forward again, knowing that another Boer force was collected at Graspan, some seven miles to the north. The Ninth Brigade and the Naval Brigade started in the afternoon for Swingspan, while the Guards moved on somewhat later with the Naval guns, armoured train, and baggage. Lord Methuen's intention was this time to attack the left of the Boer position, which was planted along a low range of hills, the highest and most commanding of which lay on their left.

The Ninth Brigade, with Rimington's horse and the Lancers, bivouacked at Swingspan, a deep depression in a valley surrounded on all sides by hills of volcanic origin. The march had been an uneventful one. The cavalry had scouted the ground in front of them, but beyond beating up a herd of springbok, and startling an occasional covey of partridges, scaring up the little birds called dikkopfs, and sending the lizards hurrying to their shelters, they saw no signs of life. The effect of the previous day's fight was evident from the fact, that although the line of march was everywhere commanded by low hills, no shot was fired. It was difficult for the troops gathered round the pool to believe that the smooth circle of hills around them was ages ago a number of active volcanoes, and that the pool might itself have been a crater; but the fact has been well ascertained. Fires were lighted, but these soon burnt down, for the men were glad to stretch themselves on the sands and fall to sleep as soon as the kettles

were boiled and their bread had been eaten. Pickets went up to the surrounding hills, and one of these found in a sangar a field-glass and walking-stick, showing that the Boers had occupied it but a short time before.

At three in the morning the troops were in motion again, and marched for five miles towards a line of kopjes some three miles from the railway-station. This station bore the two names of Enslin and Graspan, by both of which the battle was afterwards called. The Lancers scouted ahead, while Rimington's Guides watched the hills on the right. At last the enemy's entrenchments were seen extending along a series of kopjes. Their right was on two hills, one lying on each side of the railway, the left upon a high conical hill three miles to the east of it. On the ridges between were several guns, and through field-glasses the Boers could be seen hurrying towards the eastern kopje, against which they already perceived our main attack would be delivered. One of the field-batteries at once advanced and opened fire against this hill.

The armour-plated train had moved to Graspan station, and the sailors got out two of their twelve-pounder guns, leaving the others in the waggons, as there were not hands enough to work them. Presently these were joined by two batteries of artillery, and at half-past six all opened fire. Two companies of the Northumberlands acted as a covering party, and the rest were to line a low crest to the right and keep touch with the other battalions of the brigade posted there to oppose any movement that might be made from the Boer centre. Of such a movement, however, there was but little probability, as the Boers from that point were galloping with all haste to reinforce the defenders of the hill which was about to be assailed.

For two hours the fight was purely an artillery duel, the Naval guns and those of the two batteries being answered by six guns, a Hotchkiss, and a Maxim. These were well hidden from sight behind the crest line, and it was only by the light smoke that rose above them that our gunners were enabled to

direct their fire. The Guards were in rear, and were held in reserve to take part in the fight wherever their services might be most required. The Naval Brigade were upon the extreme right, and it was upon them that the honour of the assault was to fall. Entrenchments had been thrown up by the enemy along the whole range of kopjes It was evident that the Boers were in no way discouraged by their defeat two days before, for a very large body of mounted men were seen far out on our flank, in readiness to swoop down if we recoiled in confusion after failing to carry their position. Rimington's Guides were detached to watch and keep in check this force. At eight o'clock the two batteries of Royal Artillery moved away to the right to concentrate their fire on the kopje about to be attacked, and the Naval guns were ordered to withdraw, as the Boers had now accurately obtained their distance and were keeping up a tremendous fire with shrapnel upon them.

The enemy's fire, however, was so incessant and well-directed, that the officer in command, feeling that to attempt to withdraw the guns would lead to the annihilation of the men engaged in the work, maintained his position, the men throwing themselves on the ground at each flash of the enemy's guns and then leaping up and working their own pieces. So well were these served and directed that the guns opposed to them were gradually silenced.

The Naval Brigade, composed of two hundred marines and forty blue-jackets, at last advanced in skirmishing order, and pushed round to the right of the kopje. Although they were within nine hundred yards of it not a rifle was fired, and it seemed as if the fire of the two batteries had completely cleared out its defenders. The Lancers had moved still farther to the right, to prevent any body of Boers coming down through a break in the hills there to take the Naval Brigade in flank.

The ground over which they were moving was completely exposed. Having gained the desired position, the Naval Brigade now moved direct for the kopje, closing up somewhat

as they converged upon its base. When within six hundred yards from the summit, from every rock and boulder a storm of fire flashed out, and a hail of bullets swept the line. The men lay down and returned the fire, but that of the hidden foe, enormously superior in numbers, was not to be checked. The North Lancashires who were following the Naval men completely lost sight of them, so great was the cloud of dust raised by the bullets ploughing up the sand. It was evident that to remain inactive was to court annihilation, and Captain Prothero, R.N., gave the word for the advance at the double, and the men, leaping to their feet, rushed to within four hundred yards of the base. Then a terrific fire was opened from a projecting spur.

The men fell fast, but again made a rush to within two hundred yards of the base of the hill. Prothero had fallen wounded; Ethelston, the second in command, was killed. Major Plumbe of the marines called upon his men, who nobly responded; he himself was shot dead before he had gone ten yards, and Lieutenant Saunders of the *Powerful* now rushed to the front. The Maxim gun that had accompanied them remained immovable, every one of the men who worked it having fallen. They reached the base of the kopje and there threw themselves down to breathe. They had left half their comrades and nearly all their officers behind them. The din was appalling, the two British batteries maintaining a continuous fire on the face and summit of the hill. The Yorkshire Light Infantry, followed by the North Lancashires, came rushing forward to the support of the naval men, and in open order with bayonets fixed they and the marines began to make their way up.

The Boers did not await the onslaught, but deserted their entrenchments and rocks and fled, the greater portion making their way along a valley through which ran a road to the north, only a few joining their friends along the line of hills. In the centre of the position a handful of desperate men defended the rocks to the last, and were bayoneted there.

Seeing that the position they had deemed impregnable had been captured the Boers began to retreat, drawing off their guns with them. Again the weakness in cavalry prevented pursuit; and indeed both the Lancers and Rimington's Guides were too far away to be brought up in time for a successful pursuit of the mounted men, who formed the majority of the enemy's force. As to those unprovided with ponies, they had but to scatter over the hills where cavalry could not follow them, lie hidden among the boulders, and make off after nightfall.

The loss had been heavy. Of the Naval Brigade six officers and ninety-nine men were killed or wounded; the Yorkshires had fifty-three casualties, and the North Lancashires twenty. The Guards' Brigade were not engaged; they closed up at the end of the action, but were not called upon to fire a shot.

All but two of Yorke's Kaffirs who had been away came into camp after the battle was over. They had left the waggons while the fight was going on, and had hidden among the rocks until night fell. None had gained any information as to the Boer position on the Modder. None of the Boers whom they had heard conversing had been there. They had been told that the British would never get across the river, and even if they did so they would assuredly never be able to break through the strong position at Magersfontein, where Cronje intended to arrest their farther advance. They had heard that no natives had been allowed to accompany the Boers who were posted on the Modder River, and that all newcomers had been directed to Graspan, a step which Yorke concluded was designed to prevent spies or well-wishers to the British from seeing the preparations that were made. He reported as usual to the quartermaster-general.

"It is a pity that we can't get some news as to what they are doing, Mr. Harberton, but certainly you have done all that is possible that way."

"I will try and go in disguise, sir, if you will give me leave."

"I do not think there is any chance whatever that your attempt would be successful. It is evident that Cronje is determined that his plans shall be kept secret. I have no doubt that you could, as you have already done, join any commando you wished, with a fair chance of a plausible story being believed. But the fact that all the new arrivals were sent on here, and that even Kaffir drivers are not allowed to approach the river, shows that no ordinary story would pass muster for a moment. You would simply be going to your death."

"It has been tougher work than we expected, Harberton," one of the officers of the Tigers said to Yorke the next day. "Of course we thrashed them, but the loss has been heavy, and as these kopjes are scattered all over the country, we may have to fight any number of battles like this. You see, the beggars only have to ride off on their ponies and take up a fresh position; necessarily we are kept at a distance out of fire; and before we can take up the pursuit and cross the hills they have been defending, they have got a couple of miles start of us. Besides, their horses are ever so much fresher than ours, so they could go on at that game for a very long time, and there can be no doubt their losses are much lighter than ours, as we are always fighting in the open, while they are so hidden behind rocks that we don't get sight of them until they begin to bolt. However, we shall be stronger to-morrow, for I hear that the Argyle and Sutherlands will be up. That will a good deal more than fill up the vacancies caused by our casualties at Belmont and here."

The next day was passed in quiet, but on the 27th, after the wounded had been sent off by train, the force moved forward to the pools of Honeynest, eight miles south of the Modder. The march had been short, for the heat was great, and after halting, the troops revelled in the luxury of a bath, the fact that the water was thick and muddy scarcely detracting from their enjoyment. The next morning one of Rimington's Guides came in and reported that he had been

fired at from an apparently empty house near the river, and half an hour later another of Yorke's Kaffirs came in and told Yorke that the Boers with whom he had been, had made a long detour after the battle and had arrived at the Spytfontein kopjes. He found that there were very strong works there, but that they were not strongly occupied; and he had learned that a part of the force had some days before moved towards the Modder, but that no communication was allowed between them and Spytfontein.

Yorke at once went and reported the news. "That is important," the officer said. "I shall be glad if you will come with me at once to Lord Methuen, and you may as well bring your native with you, the general may wish to question him further."

The general indeed considered the information of such importance that he sent at once for one of Rimington's Guides, who spoke Kaffir perfectly, and through him asked the native many questions. There can be no doubt that the news that the main body of the Boers had at any rate moved forward towards the Modder influenced him in deciding upon the course he adopted. It had before been open to him to leave a battalion to hold the railway bridge, to prevent any Boers who might be there from crossing, and so cover the line of communication, while with the rest of his force he made a detour through Jacobsdal, and, making a wide sweep, as French's cavalry did later on, come down upon Kimberley from the north; but the fact that a large main Boer army was massed, if not at the Modder, at some place near, altered the situation. The river was fordable at many points, and were he to move away Cronje might throw his whole force across, crush the detached battalion, and take possession of the railway. It was, therefore, imperative that the direct advance upon Kimberley should be adopted.

A quarter of an hour afterwards the general, with two staff-officers, rode down to within a short distance of the Modder, but all appeared still there. The banks were fringed with

bushes; a few horses, doubtless belonging to a party of Boer scouts, grazed quietly near these. A mile away to the right were the hotels and gardens of the village; far beyond them were the hills of Spytfontein and Magersfontein. There was high ground two or three thousand yards behind the river. To the right of the railway the Riet River joined the Modder. No signs of any large body of the enemy, no earth-works or other preparations for defence, could be perceived. Although he and his staff were within easy range of the river bank not a shot was fired, and Lord Methuen came to the conclusion that the passage would be opposed at most by a comparatively small body of the Boers, and that not until he had advanced some distance would he come upon a position where Cronje was prepared to give battle. Accordingly he decided to lose no time.

Yorke had ridden out with a party of Rimington's men and ascended a low hill, from which they obtained an excellent view of the country. The Riet came down at a sharp angle to the point of its junction with the Modder. It was fringed on both sides with willows, and an enemy lying along this line would take in flank a force advancing towards the broken railway bridge. But even with their field-glasses they could see no sign of life near its banks. Albrecht, Cronje's engineer officer, knew his work, and had done it well. A very large body of Boers had been at work night and day for a fortnight, and within the line of willows and bushes deep trenches had been dug from which the Boers could fire with scarcely any danger to themselves. Gun emplacements had been formed on the northern bank both of the Riet and Modder, and had been so arranged that the guns could be easily shifted from one point to another whenever our gunners discovered their exact position and got the range. The houses and walls had all been loopholed. On the hills behind some very heavy guns had been placed, batteries had been erected on the rising ground near the village, and trenches dug everywhere close to the farther side of the rivers. Nearly ten thousand men were

lying down in absolute stillness, eagerly awaiting the moment when their unsuspecting enemies should fall into the trap so carefully prepared for them. The Transvaal commandos held the line from the railway bridge, and far up the bank of the Riet, while west of the bridge to the village the Free State men were posted.

"It looks all right," one of the officers with the party said. "I cannot make out a single soul stirring."

"I think it almost too still," another one said. "There must anyhow be some Boers about, and we should see them moving if there was not an imperative order for them not to show themselves. It is impossible to believe that they will allow us to cross the river without firing a shot, or that, as they have known for some time past that we were coming, they should have made no preparations for defence."

"Perhaps only a few hundred of them are there," another said. "They may have got such a strong position farther on that they prefer to fight us there. If they were to keep us from crossing, they would not have gained much; but if they were to defeat us somewhere on the other side of the river, the disaster might be a terrible one, for a force could come down behind us and cut off our retreat."

"But they can never defeat us," the first speaker said.

"No, we may feel pretty sure of that; but the Boers are so confident in their own fighting powers that they may very well believe that they will do so, and, of course, their dispositions will be in accordance with their belief and not with ours. There is the general with his two staff-officers riding back. You see, not a shot has been fired at them."

"It certainly looks as if they did not intend to dispute the passage of the river," another officer said; "though they may have left a few hundred men as a rear-guard when the force retired. It is evident that the Boers prefer hill-fighting."

At four o'clock the next morning the troops moved forward, the infantry leading the way, followed by the cavalry and artillery. When they reached the level plain sloping gradually

towards the river, and some three miles across, the advanced guard were fired upon by the Boers at the extremity of their position on the Riet. The Lancers galloped forward in that direction, two batteries following them, and at seven o'clock opened fire, and drove the Boers from their advanced posts. The cavalry then endeavoured to cross the river, but were forced to retire before a heavy rifle-fire, and took up their position farther back in order to cover the right flank should the Boers take the offensive. Three Boer guns now began to exchange shots with our batteries, but one of them was effectually silenced, and the others fired only occasionally.

In the meantime the infantry had been advancing in open order. To the right of the railway were the 2nd Coldstreams, the Grenadiers, the Scots Fusiliers, and a wing of the 1st Coldstreams. On the left of the line were the North Lancashires, the Yorkshires, Northumberlands, the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, with half a battalion of the 1st Coldstreams in reserve. On that side was one battery of artillery; the naval guns took up their position close to the line. So far Lord Methuen had no reason to suppose that he was opposed by a larger force than that which had established itself on the farther bank of the Riet. Accordingly there was no check in the advance. The noise of battle there had ceased, and parties of the enemy could be seen in retreat.

Cronje's plan had so far succeeded admirably. He had led his enemy to believe that they had but a small force opposed to them, and that this was already in retreat, and therefore, tempted them on to the plain, where they would be exposed to a murderous fire along their whole front, and which would be swept also by the strong force on the Riet. Not a shot was fired until the leading companies of the Guards were within a thousand yards of the river, when from the screen of trees and bush a line of fire burst out, and a hail of bullets swept the plain. Though many fell, no confusion was caused by this terrible surprise. The Guards at

once lay down and steadily returned the fire of their invisible foes. There was no shelter to be taken, no favouring rock or bush. The plain was perfectly even and bare. Some were fortunate enough to find an ant-hill between them and their foe, others some scrub eight or ten inches only in height, but most of them lay on the bare sand.

It was well for them that they had marched that day without their greatcoats, for these would have shown up clearly upon the light sand, whereas at a thousand yards the khaki-clad figures could scarce be made out by the keenest-sighted Boer. The scream of the bullets overhead was unceasing; the dust was knocked up as if by a hail-storm driven by a mighty wind; and even above the rattle of the musketry and the roar of cannon, the quick thud of the machine-guns firing one-pound shells—afterwards called by the men pom-poms—added a new horror to warfare.

The Scots Guards had suffered most from this outburst of fire, because they were nearest to the Riet, and therefore more exposed to the flanking fire of the Transvaalers there than were the battalions to their left. Their Maxim was almost immediately disabled by the pom-pom, and most of the men serving it killed. To remain in the position meant annihilation, and they fell back a few hundred yards to an old reservoir.

The Grenadiers and the 2nd Coldstreams were fortunate in finding some little protection under a very slight rise in the ground. All through the day the Guardsmen lay prone in the positions in which they had first halted. To retreat under that ceaseless hail of fire would have been as dangerous as to advance. There was nothing to do but to lie still and suffer. The sun beat down upon them with withering heat. Most of them lay with their rifles under them, for the breeches and barrels were too hot to handle. They were parched by a terrible thirst, and many were wounded, but neither water nor stretcher could be carried to them through the hail of bullets. The streams of balls from the pom-poms tried them

even more than the bullets. At times there was a slight lull in the firing, but the slightest movement caught the eyes of the watchful foe, and it then broke out again with renewed fury. It was clear from the first that nothing could be done on this side of the railway, and that the coming of darkness could alone bring relief.

Happily, however, things were going better to the left of the railway. The two batteries of artillery had galloped across to that side, and, pushing on with extreme bravery, had opened a heavy fire upon the village and the Boer entrenchments. They were exposed not only to a continuous musketry fire, but to a cannonade from the Boer guns on the heights, more numerous and of heavier metal than their own; but they maintained their ground, aided by the four 12-pounders of the naval men. At half-past eleven, however, one of the batteries had to fall back, having lost heavily, and having nearly exhausted its ammunition. Twenty-five horses were killed as they dragged the guns back, and the officers' chargers had to be harnessed in their places.

It was due chiefly to the artillery that the day was finally won. Not only did they keep down the fire of the Boer marksmen by a hail of shrapnel, and shake the courage of the Free State men, but our men, lying themselves helpless, were cheered by the knowledge that our guns might yet be preparing a way for them to advance and to come within striking distance of their lurking foes.

Until two o'clock but little progress had been made on the left by the sorely-tried troops. The advance had been brought to a stand-still when it reached a point abreast of that obtained by the Guards. The frontal fire was as heavy, but they were not, like their comrades, scourged by a flanking fire, for although a party of Boers had pressed some distance round the extreme left, where there was rough ground that afforded some shelter, these were kept in check by the fire of the North Lancashires.

At two o'clock relief was furnished to the gunners by the

arrival of another battery, which had made a tremendous march from Belmont, and had now come up in time to take part in the desperate struggle. They at once came into action, and aided in sweeping the Boer position with shrapnel. Lord Methuen moved as many troops as could be spared from the right to aid in the left attack, where alone success seemed possible. The fire of the newly-arrived battery speedily drove the Boers established on our extreme left across the river, and the fire from the Free Staters, in their trenches among the willows on the south side, began to slacken, affording ground for the belief that here also they were becoming demoralized by the fire to which they were exposed, and were crossing the stream. The Yorkshires, Northumberlands, and Highlanders sprang to their feet, and with a rush charged a farmhouse strongly held which had covered the approach to the drift. The Boers here fled at once, and the troops, without halting, dashed forward, cheering loudly, delighted that at last they had become the assailants. Closely following the Boers, they reached the weir erected across the river to deepen the water above, and made their way across holding by an iron bar above it.

The feat was performed under a tremendous fire. Though man after man fell, those behind crept forward until four hundred men had crossed and established themselves on the northern bank. Two hundred of the Lancashires followed them. It was a great success, and decided the fortune of the day, although for a time this still hung in the balance. General Pole-Carew, who was in command of the brigade, led them along the bank, pressing on towards the Boer centre. Cronje, however, drew supports from his left, and after winning their way for three-quarters of a mile, the pressure brought to bear against the British was too great to be withstood. Opposed by a greatly superior force in front, and suffering from a flanking fire from the entrenched slopes above them, the troops fell slowly back again, but maintained themselves near the dam against all the efforts of the Boers to drive them across it.

So the fight went on until darkness fell and the fire ceased. The troops could do no more. They had been at work since four in the morning, without breakfast; they had suffered tortures from heat and thirst during their long hours of inactivity, they had throughout the day been exposed to a terrible fire, which they had been unable to return effectually; and General Colville, who had succeeded to the command at half-past five, when Lord Methuen had been wounded, felt that he could ask no more of them, and contented himself with making preparations for passing the whole force early next morning across the dam Pole-Carew had won. But in the morning the Boers had gone. With his right turned, and the Free Staters utterly demoralized, Cronje felt that he could not hope to prevent the main body of the British from crossing, in which case they would be placed between him and Kimberley, and it would be impossible for him to regain the position he had so carefully prepared. The Boers, therefore, silently left the entrenchments they had occupied and marched away to Spytfontein.

Had the men from the Free State possessed the hardihood of those from the Transvaal, it is morally certain that no passage of the river could have been effected; but the military system which north of the Vaal was vigorous though irregular, and made every man a soldier, was but a shadow in the Orange Free State. At peace with their neighbours, fearing no attack, on good terms with the British Government, whose territory adjoined their own to the south and west, and for the most part to the east, save where Basutoland, wholly under British influence, touched them, it seemed there was no occasion to maintain a military organization. They had given themselves up to peaceful pursuits, and although a pastoral people, were immeasurably in advance of their neighbours north of the Vaal. The majority, too, wholly disapproved of the war into which the ambition of their president had forced them, and in such a mood might well be shaken by the terrible bombardment they had to face.

Considering the incessant fire to which, for some twelve hours, the British troops had been exposed, it is remarkable that our casualties should not have exceeded four hundred and fifty. Of these one hundred and twelve were contributed by the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, and sixty-nine by the Coldstreams.

But even to the troops lying helpless all day, the hours had not passed more slowly and painfully than to the cavalry in their enforced inactivity. They had dismounted to ease their horses, and the men and officers of Rimington's Guides stood in little groups ready to mount at a moment's notice.

"It is awful," one of the officers said; "it is simply awful! One would think that not a single man exposed to that storm of fire would be found alive at the end of the day. What maddens one is the thought that all this might have been spared us, if we had not blundered into it as if we had been going to a picnic. Why, if only a troop of us had been sent down yesterday afternoon, or early this morning, to reconnoitre, we should have been spared all this. We could have dismounted here and made our way down in very open order, on foot, say fifty yards apart, and pushed on till we got to the willows, and through them to the river bank; or, better still, we could have entered the willows to the right here and searched them thoroughly right round across the railway and as far as the village.

"As it turns out, of course we should have lost three-quarters of our number; but those who got back would have told of the hidden rifle-pits, and the fact that the Boers were gathered there in great force. But somehow, it was taken for granted that there would not be any serious resistance. Even when the troops went forward, there were no scouts pushed out in front of the attacking line. We have just fallen into the trap they set for us. It was the same at Belmont and at Graspan. We only found out where the enemy were in force when they opened a blaze of fire at us.

"I was chatting with a private in the infantry, who, before

he joined the army, was a volunteer in one of the London battalions, and he told me that when Lord Methuen was in command of the district there was no one more particular than he as to patrols being thrown out far ahead and the ground being thoroughly scouted. He was very popular, for though strict, he was always kind and considerate. As to his bravery there is no question, and the way in which he is exposing himself to-day, galloping about from point to point open to Boer fire, is splendid; but I fancy his staff will be thinned out before the end of the day."

"Those fellows must be well in hand," another said, "or they would never have held their fire when he rode up to within four hundred yards of them yesterday. They could have made a certainty of picking him and the two officers with him off at that distance, and if only half a dozen had fired it would have seemed that there might still only be a little party left behind.

"The beggars seem to have more idea of discipline than we gave them credit for. They must have been sitting as quiet as mice until they opened fire, for, watching the bushes closely with my glass, I did not see as much as a leaf stir."

And so they talked until they saw the rush of the men of the Ninth Brigade down to the river, and although they could not make out exactly what was doing, they concluded by the gradual disappearance of the troops and the roar of musketry that they must have succeeded in crossing the river. The relief was intense, and the men shouted and cheered and waved their hats in the greatest delight. The officers joined in a lively argument as to what was likely to take place. All agreed that it would be next to impossible to move troops over to support those who had crossed, for by their own feelings of exhaustion, brought on by hunger, thirst, heat, and excitement, they felt sure that the troops, who had gone through a far more severe ordeal, would need food, drink, and at least some hours' rest before they could again take up the stern work. At the same time, all saw that if the Boers

hurled themselves on the little force on the other side of the river, assistance must be sent, whatever the state of the men might be.

"They have only to call for volunteers," one officer said, "and I doubt if a man would hold back. After what they have gone through, it would almost galvanize a dead man into life to know that there was a chance at last to meet face to face the men who had been making a target of them. But I expect the Boers must be nearly as done up as we are. They were in their places before daylight, and although I don't suppose our bullets have disposed of many of them, their nerves must be so shaken up by our artillery fire that I can't think there can be much fight left in them. We know that their fire on the left has been slackening for some time, and the fact that our fellows have been able to fight their way across is another proof of it. Besides, as we saw at the last two fights, they lose heart directly they see their retreat threatened, and they must know that they will be cut off altogether from the place they have fortified farther on, if we can but maintain our footing, for success on our left would put us between them and Kimberley."

CHAPTER VIII

A DANGEROUS MISSION

THE next morning a portion of the troops crossed the Modder; the rest moved down and encamped on the south side of the river. The first task to be performed was the sad one of collecting and burying the dead; that of carrying off the wounded had begun as soon as the slackening of the Boer fire permitted the stretcher-bearers to move about on the plain, and many of the soldiers, as soon as they had quenched their thirst, had, in spite of their fatigue, assisted in the work, and by midnight all had received the first aid from the medical

officers. For these there was no sleep, for all night they were engaged in attending to the more serious cases; and by twelve o'clock next day the greater part of the wounded were ready to be despatched by train.

As soon as Yorke had seen his horse picketed with those of the rest of the corps, and had eaten a few mouthfuls of preserved meat and biscuit, he had gone down with Major Lindley, the surgeon of the Guides, and many of the men and officers, and aided in carrying in the wounded. On arriving with the first batch at the hospital he said to the surgeon, who was busy at work:

"Can I be of any assistance, sir?"

"Yes, you can help if you will. We are very short of hands, as so many of the men have to go down with the wounded from Belmont and Graspan. If you will keep me supplied with the water, sponges, lint, and bandages, you will be of great service."

It was trying work to Yorke, unaccustomed as he was to such scenes, and several times he felt that he must go out for a few minutes to breathe the fresh air; but he stuck to it, and felt well rewarded when, in the morning, the surgeon he had been attending said heartily, "I thank you warmly, sir; you have saved me a great deal of time, and have been of much assistance to me. I am surprised that you have been able to go through with it, for even to us, accustomed to hospital work, it has been very exhausting."

On leaving the hospital marquee he went away to a quiet spot, dropped on the ground, and slept for some hours. Then he went to the camp of the Guides. Most of these were already away scouting, and having no duties to perform, he walked down to the river and crossed by the dam by which the men of the Ninth Brigade had effected their passage on the previous afternoon. The men not engaged in the duty of burying the dead, or of preparing for the all-important work of throwing a pontoon bridge across the river by which the guns and waggons could pass, were cleaning their accoutrements, cook-

ing, or bathing in the river, while many of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders were seated at the edge of the stream dipping their legs in the water.

They had suffered more severely than the other regiments of the brigade, and the advantage of trousers over kilts had been abundantly proved on the preceding day. From the fact that their dark kilts had shown them up, while their companions in khaki were almost invisible, their casualties were heavier than those of other regiments, and their legs had been so blistered by the sun's rays that many were almost unable to walk. On passing through the street of the village Yorke met the head of the Intelligence Department. The latter stopped.

"Ah! Mr. Harberton," he said, "your Kaffirs failed us when most wanted. Had one of them brought us news that the whole Boer strength was here it would have saved us a number of valuable lives."

"I am sorry indeed, sir," Yorke replied; "but you know the one who came in before the battle did bring news that no Kaffir teamsters or others were allowed to go near the Modder village, but had to make a detour on their way to Spytfontein."

"Yes, I know he did, and it is a pity now that we did not take his news more seriously. But it is always difficult to rely upon Kaffir evidence; the man might never have gone that way at all, and might have got up his story as an excuse for not bringing in news. And when Lord Methuen rode down himself close to the river he saw no signs of life in the place. Now as to yourself. I understood from Colonel Pinkerton that you had specially joined with the intention of scouting and carrying despatches."

"I did, sir. I have a very good horse, and can ride. I am a light-weight. I speak Dutch well enough to pass, and can get on in the Kaffir tongue. I should be happy to undertake any duty with which you might entrust me."

"We want a message carried into Kimberley. There will probably be a delay of a fortnight before we can receive reinforcements that will enable us to attack the enemy with any

hope of success in the strong position they are said to occupy. Will you undertake to attempt to get round?"

"I shall consider it an honour to do so, sir. Should I go in uniform or as a Dutch farmer?"

"I think in uniform; you would have more risk of being taken, but if captured, you would have a right to be treated as a prisoner of war; while if you go in disguise, they would, I have no doubt, shoot you as a spy. It is not as if you wished to gather news; it is a question entirely of speed and of evading observation. Very well, Mr. Harberton. Where is your horse?"

"It is over at Major Rimington's camp, sir."

"Well, I will send a mounted orderly for it. In the meantime you can examine our map. It is by no means perfect, but at least it will afford you some indications, especially when you approach Kimberley. A runner brought us three days since a sketch-map showing the position of the Boers round the town, and this, when you get there, will certainly be of value to you. One of the sergeants will make a tracing for you. You shall see the despatch you are to carry, and had better get it by heart, so that, if you are pursued and find yourself likely to be taken, you can destroy it, for you would doubtless be searched so thoroughly, that however well you might conceal it, they would be likely to discover it. Now, let us look at the map;" and, entering the house where he had established his office, he passed through the room in which the non-commissioned officers were at work, and entered the one behind it.

"Here is the map," he said. "You see the Boer positions round Kimberley are much closer together than those on this side, for, until we crossed the Modder, it would be naturally considered that it was from that side relief was expected, or that messengers might come and go. But on this side there are also a great many of them; they are thick round Wimbledon, and thicker still between Scholtz Kop and Spytfontein. But these would, of course, be intended rather for resistance

against a force advancing this way than for offence against the town. There are two here, however, standing to the right of the road between this place and the town. There may be some patrols thrown out on the road; it is probable that there are some, and here is the principal danger. Between that road and the railway and the town of Wimbledon there are no entrenchments marked. Of course they may exist, but the Kimberley people are only able to send us the posts which they can make out with their glasses, or by their fire. As you see, the ground is very rough and broken, and would probably be very difficult to ride across in the dark if you were to leave the road. I may say that a small party of cavalry have been out this morning seven or eight miles along the road, and encountered no opposition, but were fired at several times by parties on the hills. But it is certainly likely enough that they come down on to the road after dark. I will send a dozen troopers as an escort with you for the first four or five miles."

"I should say, sir, that it would be best for me only to ride for a few miles, then to dismount and make my way on foot. If you will allow me, I will send a note by the orderly who fetches my horse to two of my Kaffirs bidding them accompany it here—one of them especially is a very shrewd fellow—their eyes and ears are much better than mine. I should send one of them back with my horse, and take the other with me. I have a compass, but it would be of no use in the dark; and I might lose my bearings altogether if by myself, for I could not venture to strike a match."

"It would be a very good plan, Mr. Harberton. Please write your note at once, I have already sent for a mounted orderly."

Yorke at once wrote a note to Major Rimington, or the officer commanding in his absence, begging him to send the two Kaffirs, Ugly Jack and Long Peter, with the orderly, who would bring back his horse. While the orderly was away he studied the map, and when the officer returned from head-

quarters with the despatch, which was written in small characters on a strip of thin paper, he learned it by heart. It stated that the army had, after its engagement, crossed the Modder, but that it could not advance until joined by reinforcements now on their way. It asked for any intelligence that might be gathered by the besieged as to the Boers' position and force, and enquired as to the state of provisions in the town, and how long, in case the army failed to arrive, they could maintain themselves. It stated that large reinforcements were on their way out, and that Buller had, so far, failed to relieve Ladysmith, but hoped that he would soon do so, and that the Boers were making but little way in the invasion of Cape Colony. It added: "The bearer will give you further details as to the state of affairs". It was directed to Colonel Kekewich.

After the business was concluded, Yorke was invited to join the staff at lunch, which he was not sorry to do. When this was finished, he was asked to dine with them also, as he would not be able to start till after dark.

Many of the Boer rifles had been picked up, and great quantities of ammunition, which had been left in the trenches, collected. The arms were to be destroyed, and Yorke, at luncheon, asked the officer to give him an order for the Kaffir who was going with him to take one of them. "It is quite certain," he said, "that if we are caught, they will shoot the native, whether he is armed or not, and I think the man ought to have a chance of at least trying to defend his life."

"I will give you an order for him to take one, but it had better be put in my office till you start, or he would have trouble with every officer he met. I think that, as you say, it is only fair to give the man a chance, though I don't suppose it will be of much use to him, for he is not likely to be a good shot even with an ordinary rifle, and he would know nothing of the working of a Mauser."

"I could show him how to work it in five minutes," Yorke

said; "and if he cannot shoot, he could load as fast as I could fire."

The officer smiled. "I fancy if you get cut off, Mr. Harberton, your best plan would be to tie a handkerchief to your rifle in token of surrender. Possibly they might then content themselves with taking you as a prisoner of war, while if you were to shoot some of them, the others would not be very likely to respect your uniform."

"I don't want to fight, certainly," Yorke said; "and I should not think of resisting unless I saw a chance of doing so successfully, as, for instance, if I were seen and chased by two or three mounted Boers when I was getting near our own lines."

"Yes, in that case the rifle might be useful. The Boers have considerable respect for a single man with a good rifle in the open. However, I hope you will get through unobserved. You certainly will have more chance to-night than you would otherwise have, for they will be even more tired than our men, as they probably marched all night to Spytfontein. Moreover, they have their wounded to attend to, and will, no doubt, be very much down in the mouth at being turned out here, where they felt absolutely certain of holding their own. Still, Cronje could not have had anything like all his force here, and some of the men who stopped in their lines will be sent out to watch the roads to-night, lest we should push forward a brigade to relieve Kimberley."

On going out, Yorke found that the Kaffirs had arrived with his horse.

"Peter," he said in Dutch, "I am going to try to get into Kimberley. I want you to go with me. I have chosen you for two reasons: in the first place, because I know that you are a good man; and in the second, because you are the only one of the party who has been in the town, for you told me that you had worked there for two years. Are you willing to go? It is a very dangerous business, for if we are caught, the Boers are not likely to show us any mercy."

"I will go, baas," the man said, speaking, as usual, in Dutch. "If you can go I can; if you are killed I will be killed."

"Your danger is greater than mine, Peter. I shall be in uniform; and they may take me prisoner, but they would be certain to shoot you."

The Kaffir nodded. "Shoot me, sure enough, baas; but I will go with you. You will go in the dark, I suppose? How could you find your way if you were alone? You could not keep on the road. The Boers are sure to keep watch there."

"I feel that, Peter. If it were not for that I would not risk anyone else's life. I mean to ride the first part of the way. Jack, you will go with us so far, and bring my horse back, and take it to Major Rimington's lines. I shall give you a letter to Hans to tell him to look after you all till I come back."

"Cannot I go with you too, baas?" the man asked.

"No, that would be of no use, Jack. The more there are of us, the more chance there is of being seen. Now, here is an order on the supply-stores for two days' rations. Draw them at once. Go back to camp and fetch the spare water-bottles we got at De Aar, bring four of them, two for each of us. We may not be able to get through to-night, and may have to lie up at some hiding-place till it is dark again. I will get hold of some biscuits and a tin of meat."

Having now finished his arrangements Yorke went down and made an inspection of the deserted trenches of the Boers. These were generally some four feet deep, and, like those at Graspan, had evidently been tenanted for some days. They were for the most part some seven feet long and four feet wide. They had been untouched since their occupiers had fled, for there was nothing in them to tempt the soldiers to search them. He had no difficulty in finding a couple of tins of meat and as much bread as he required. All were littered with empty cartridge-cases, showing how large was the provision that had been made, and how steadily the Boers had

for hours maintained their fire. There were, too, piles of still unused cartridges. His own bandolier was full, but he put as many as he could carry into his pocket.

In the afternoon he went to the office where he had placed the Mauser rifle, when it had, by the officer's orders, been handed to him, put his own rifle in its place, and, slinging the Mauser on his shoulder, went out again. Presently he found the two Kaffirs squatted near his horse, which they were feeding with bread they had picked up. Calling Peter to follow him he went into a quiet spot among the trees.

"You are going to carry a rifle, Peter," he said, "the one that I have got on my shoulder. Can you shoot?"

"I can shoot with a common gun, baas, but I don't know that thing; it doesn't seem to have any hammer."

"No, it is a Mauser. That is the gun the Boers use. I will show you how it works, for if we should get into trouble, and there are only a few Boers, we might fight. You see this slip, holding five cartridges. The breech opens like this; you push the five cartridges into the magazine, close it with this bolt, and the gun is ready for firing five shots without removing it from the shoulder. When the last shot is fired, you reload as before. You see how I do it. Now, let me see you try; but don't pull the trigger. If you were to fire, we should alarm the camp."

After a dozen attempts the Kaffir learnt the knack of loading and firing the gun.

"I have plenty of cartridges here. You had better go and look in the Boer trenches, and you will find scores of bandoliers lying about. Pick two out, one for yourself and one for me, and fill them with cartridges. When we start I will divide those I have with you. That will amount to something like two hundred shots apiece. I am going to leave my rifle here and take another Mauser, as these cartridges won't fit my gun. Here are two tins of meat and enough bread to last us for a day, in case we cannot get straight through and have to hide up. Get hold of a piece of stuff to tie them

all up in a bundle, which you can sling on your rifle. Fill these four water-bottles with the best water you can find. Don't take it out of the river, it is likely enough that there are a good many dead Boers in it. Now, there is nothing more for you to do before we start. You had better watch the horse by turns. Take it down to the river and give it a good drink an hour before sunset.

"You will find plenty of blankets in the Boer trenches. Take a couple of these and cut them up into strips, and before it gets dark fasten these thickly to the horse's hoofs, so that they will make no noise on the road. Fasten a roll of it on to my saddle; I shall twist it round my boots when I dismount, then I shall be less likely to slip in climbing over the rocks. And now I have one more word to say to you. If we should be surprised by the Boers, and I find that I must be taken, you are to escape if possible. Your death could be of no benefit to me, and if you were killed I should not forgive myself for having brought you with me. Now, you quite understand that this is an absolute order. But at the same time, when you have escaped you may be of immense service, you are to remember that. Of course, if I am kept a prisoner at Spytfontein you would find it altogether impossible to get near me; but if I am sent to Pretoria, you might follow at some distance, and possibly aid me to make my escape. So you see it would be to my interest, as well as your own, that you should get clear away."

The Kaffir, who had looked sullen at the first part of the instructions, brightened up. "I understand, baas. As long as baas fights, Peter will fight; when baas says 'Go', Peter will run off, and do what he can to help afterwards."

Yorke now returned to the office, and asked one of the sergeants there to look after his own rifle till he returned, and then went to the heap of Boer weapons and picked out a Mauser. All being now ready, he lay down and slept until sunset, and then went in to dinner. After the meal was over, the colonel took him in to the general's quarters, and said,

"This is Mr. Harberton, sir; he is going to start in an hour or so with your despatch for Kimberley."

"Do you know the country, Mr. Harberton?" the general asked.

"No, sir, but I am taking with me one of the Kaffirs who has been there for two years. He worked at Dutoitspan, which is, he says, on this side of the town and not far from Beaconsfield, so that he knows the country all round perfectly; and I have every confidence that he will be able to guide me in, especially as the ground for the last few miles is flat. Of course I shall leave the road when I have gone a few miles, and make my way across the hills."

"It will be a hazardous journey, Mr. Harberton, and I admire your spirit in undertaking such a mission. I understand that you speak Taal well, but as you are going in uniform that will be no great advantage to you. If you succeed, I need not say that you will have rendered us a very great service, which will not be forgotten."

"It is just the service that I had hoped I should find an opportunity of performing, sir, when I volunteered to undertake the work of scouting and obtaining information, instead of enlisting in one of the regiments at Cape Town."

"Yes, I hear you rendered valuable service to the officer in command at De Aar by going in disguise to Fauresmith, and discovering that the Boers had no intention of attacking our base, for it was thus unnecessary to draw bodies of men from other points to aid in the defence of the place. I should not advise you to endeavour to return by the road by which you came, although you will be the best judge as to that; but it seems to me that it would be easier to get out by the other side and make a detour across the river somewhere near Douglas, and then make for Honeynest Kloof, and so here. Above all, tell Colonel Kekewich privately that it is by no means certain that we shall be able to force our way past Spytfontein. Lord Methuen will try to do so, but after what we have seen of the Boer style of fighting here there is no

assurance that he will succeed, for the position by all accounts is a very strong one.

"Of course it will be impossible for you now to travel far by the road from here; the Boer position extends across it. Your best chance is to strike across the country and come on the road from Jacobsdal. Whether they are posted on that line or not I cannot say. It certainly lies beyond their main position, but they will hardly have neglected it altogether."

"Yes, sir, that is the route I propose taking."

"Well, I wish you good fortune and a safe return;" and he shook hands with Yorke.

At eight o'clock Yorke started. The horse's hoofs had been effectually muffled and he had been provided with the countersign, and, passing through the pickets, he rode off, the Kaffirs trotting by his side. He had told the officer in command of the pickets that one of them would return with the horse in the course of an hour. After proceeding about four miles a glow of light could be seen here and there on Scholtz Kop, a short distance to the left of the road they were following, and also away farther over on the same side on the hill of Spytfontein. These were but the reflection of the fires in the trenches, where the Boers were cooking their suppers and smoking their pipes. No flame betrayed the positions held by them, but the hills seemed lit up by a faint glow.

"It is time to turn off, Peter," Yorke said, reining in his horse. "They may have outposts on the road, and as they would be keeping quiet, we might get in among them before we noticed them."

Although they were still nearly two miles from the Boer position they could distinctly hear in the stillness of the night a faint continuous murmur, such as might be made by a waterfall or a stream running among rocks. This they knew to be the talk of thousands of the enemy. They had been conscious of it even before they reached the turn in the road whence they saw the lights, for their own advance had

been almost noiseless. The Kaffirs were running barefoot, and the horse's hoofs had been so well muffled that its footstep was no more audible than those of the natives.

It was now time to dismount and send the horse back, and Yorke handed the animal over to the native who was to return to camp.

"When you get half-way back, Jack," Yorke said, "take off those blankets from the horse's feet, so that our sentries can hear your approach. If you were to come up quite silently, and they did not hear you till you were close to them, they might fire hastily. Therefore, lead the horse, and when you get near the lines strike up a song—not too loud, but so that they can hear you a hundred yards away. When they challenge, that is to say, when they call, 'Who comes there?' you answer as I told you, then they will let you pass, though they may keep you until their officer comes. As I spoke to him on the way out, he will pass you through. Don't go right into the lines near the Modder; half a mile outside lead the horse off the road and wait with him till it is daylight. You would be challenged by every sentry in camp if you were to enter in the dark."

"Good fortune to you, baas! I wish I were going with you," Jack said, and then led the horse away.

"Now, Peter," continued Yorke, "our work begins. The first thing is to put the strips of blanket round our feet. You had better put on your own shoes and muffle them, otherwise you might lame yourself among the rocks, and that would be fatal to us both."

The native did as he was told, then he said, "Let us stop a little, baas, and listen. There may be Boers on that hill we have to cross."

He stood for a minute or two listening intently. "There are men up there," he said.

"Did you hear voices?"

"No, but I heard a click as if a kettle had hit against a stone. I am certain that there are some of them up there—

not many, perhaps, but certainly there are men there. We had better go back a little between that hill and the next. I will walk first, you follow quite close to me; I can see in the dark much better than you can. If there are rocks in the way I will stop, then you put your hand on my shoulder and I will lead you between them or show you where to climb across them."

"All right, Peter! I trust in you entirely, for I could not see a stone the size of my head on the ground."

It took them four hours of severe work before they came down on the Jacobsdal road. The ground had in many places been covered with rocks and boulders, through which it would have been hard work to pick a way in the daylight, and quite impossible in the darkness for Yorke, had it not been for the guidance and assistance of Peter. Sometimes they had to climb rough and precipitous hills, and, more difficult still, to descend the boulder-strewn slopes. In spite of the care of his guide Yorke had had several heavy falls, had cut his hands and knees, and seriously damaged his garments.

"Now, shall we follow the road, baas?"

"No, we had better not. There may be parties moving between Jacobsdal and the Boer lines round Kimberley, or reinforcements coming down to Jacobsdal from the north."

"They would not travel at night," Peter said positively. "Boers can ride all day, but nothing would make them go out at night if they could help it. Boers sleep like a pig."

"Well, we will keep to the road for a bit then. I should like to push on as fast as we can, for we have some sixteen miles to go yet and we have lost a lot of time in getting across here, and if we were to take to the rocks again there would be very little chance of our getting through the Boer lines before daylight."

They had gone about a mile when the native stopped. "Men on the road, baas."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, baas. I heard one strike a match."

Walking very carefully, they could presently make out a dark mass ahead of them. "Waggons, baas," Peter whispered, and they at once left the road, moved a couple of hundred yards to the right, and then, stepping with the greatest care, continued their way parallel with the road. They could hear the sound of voices as two or three Boers talked together, and occasionally a movement among the oxen. They could not make out the outline of the waggons, nor see in which direction they had been moving, but guessed that it was a party of Boers from the north, moving down to strengthen Jacobsdal, or it might be a convoy of stores from that town for the use of the force beleaguering Kimberley. For the next hour their progress was very slow, for they had to make their way through thick bush, and it needed the greatest caution to avoid being heard by the party on the road.

It was not that they feared being hit by their fire, but the sound of rifle shots would put all the Boers within sound of them on the watch, and greatly diminish their chance of getting through. As soon as they were a quarter of a mile beyond the waggons they came down nearer to the road again. Here there were no bushes, but the ground was thickly covered with boulders of all sizes. At times the hills approached so close to the road that they were obliged to take to it for a while. Whenever this was the case they went at a trot, but as they were now abreast of the line of the Boer forts, they took to the rocks again as soon as possible. Twice they heard parties of horsemen coming along the road, and hid up until these had passed.

"They do not mean to be caught napping, Peter," Yorke said. "They are evidently uneasy. I have no doubt they are well prepared along the Spytfontein line, but they cannot be sure that we shall try to break through that way, and may believe that we shall attack Jacobsdal, and, making a wide circuit, enter Kimberley from the north. In some respects that might be the better plan, and I have no doubt

the general has well considered it; but although he might get into Kimberley that way without any fighting, he would be worse off when he got there than he is on the Modder. He has not sufficient stores collected yet to provision Kimberley for any length of time, and the fighting the other day showed that he has not enough men to defeat the whole Boer force stationed among the kopjes, so that he would be completely cut off, with the enemy between him and any force coming up to his assistance."

Steadily they plodded on, keeping for the most part along the road, and stopping frequently to listen. Several times Peter declared that there were Boers among the hills on either side of them, and once or twice even Yorke could faintly hear what he judged to be snoring in the stillness of the night air. At length even the keen ears of the native were unable to detect any warning sound, and he declared that they must now have passed the outside line.

"We have done with them now, Peter, till we get near those round the town."

They went fast now, for the night was nearly over, and the sky was beginning to lighten in the east when, leaving the road, they ascended the hill and saw a level plain stretching before them.

"It is too late to get through," Yorke said; "another quarter of an hour and it will be light, and that dark mass of houses we see there must be nearly three miles away."

"Yes, baas, that is Beaconsfield; Kimberley is more away to the left, I can just make it out. What will you do now, baas? Go back a bit and hide, or go on to that little house half a mile away close to the road?"

"I think we had best go on. We should have to go a good bit back to a place where the boulders are thick enough to give us a good hiding-place; it will certainly be light before we get there, indeed I am afraid it will be light enough before we can gain that hut, if there are any Boers on the look-out on that kopje to the right."

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A RACE FOR LIFE

They started at once, and had gone but half-way when they found that the distance had been deceiving, and that it was nearer a mile than half a mile to the hut, which, being white-washed, had seemed much nearer than it was. The light was broadening out rapidly and they ran at the top of their speed, but just before they reached the place a shot rang out from a low hill some four hundred yards away. For a moment Yorke hesitated, but he knew that where there were Boers there were ponies, and that they would be overtaken long before they could reach the British camp.

"We had better fight it out here, Peter. The firing may bring up help; we can certainly keep the Boers off for some time."

The hut was some twelve feet square, a rough building of loose stone with a light roof. It apparently had been made for the occupation of men working on the road. It had no windows, and the door stood open.

"Now, Peter, get to work and get a stone or two out on that side so that we can fire on the enemy; the hole must be as small as possible. If we can make one or two on each side so much the better. I will bring some stones from outside to block the door up, then I will help you."

He rolled in blocks, closed the door, and placed them against it. Then he set to work to make loopholes. The walls were loosely built, so that in two or three minutes he had made a satisfactory hole in the front of the hut, while Peter had already made one at the back.

"It is lucky that we did not run on," Yorke said, as he looked out. "There are a dozen mounted Boers coming along from behind the hill. Work away, Peter, we had better have two holes, one on each side of the door; I will show these fellows that we mean fighting when they come a little nearer. They are sure to draw off and talk, and that will give us plenty of time to get ready for them."

When the mounted Boers were within four hundred yards he took a steady aim and fired, one of them fell headlong from

his horse; the others reined in sharply, but before they could turn, the rifle spoke out twice, another man fell, and a third swerved in his saddle evidently hard hit; the others galloped off, but the fourth cartridge in the magazine did its work, and another man fell. Yorke recharged his rifle, stood it in a corner, and then aided Peter.

"You hit them, baas?"

"I have killed three and wounded one," he said quietly. "That will make them careful; anyhow, they have learned that we can shoot."

"There are some men coming down the hill, baas."

"Very well, then, do you go on with your work, I will check them a bit too."

He went to a loophole the native had completed. Some twenty or thirty men were coming down the hill; the lesson given to the horsemen had not been without its effect on them also, for they were taking to what cover boulders and bush afforded. He waited till he got a good view of a man making his way from one shelter to another, and as he fired the Boer fell headlong. A dozen rifles flashed in reply; two or three bullets went through the roof, which was only of felt spread over a light framework, the others pattered harmlessly against the wall.

"Look out occasionally to see what the mounted men are doing, Peter. There is little chance of these fellows on the hill making up their minds to try a rush across the open ground, and though they may be good shots, their chance of getting a ball through a hole two inches wide and three high is not very great; it would be as well to make two more, so that we can move from one point to another."

Peter soon finished his work.

"May I fire now, baas?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, but make sure of your aim. I have fired about twenty shots and at least eighteen have told. Certainly eight, counting those at the horsemen, have been fatal, that is what keeps them so quiet. A number of misses would encourage them.

Always rest the muzzle of your rifle on bottom of the loop-hole. You had best fix upon your man, and watch the shelter where he is lying, then you won't be hurried, and can fire directly he moves or changes his position."

"Well done!" he exclaimed two or three minutes later, when, as Peter fired, he saw a Boer pitch forward, while the native raised a triumphant shout.

For hours the exchange of rifle-fire continued.

"They won't move till it is dark," Yorke said at one o'clock; "then will be the dangerous time"

"They will be able to creep up to the door and blow it in when it gets dark, baas. The best plan will be for you to slip out and run; I will keep on firing, and they will think that we are both here; and when you have got a good start I will run too. The Boers on foot would never catch me; and as to the mounted men, they would not find me in the dark, I could hear them and they would not hear me, and I could always find some bush or boulder where I could hide if they came my way."

"I will not do that, Peter, unless you give me your solemn oath that you will not stay more than five minutes after I have gone. I am a good runner too."

"I will promise that, baas. I don't want the Boers to catch me, but if we were to stop firing they would guess at once that we had gone. I will fire very quick, sometimes out of one hole sometimes out of the other, so that they will think there are two of us. They would stop a minute or two after I had done firing, and then come up very slowly and cautiously. The only fear is from the mounted men, who will be out on the plain as soon as it is dark."

CHAPTER IX

KIMBERLEY

THE Boer fire slackened as the day went on, for the besiegers had learned that it was death to raise a head above a rock. There were originally a hundred Boers on the kopje, and of these eighteen had been killed and twelve wounded, the proportion of killed being so great in consequence of the majority of wounds being in the head. A messenger had been despatched to them from a hill on the other side of the road, but hearing that there were only two men in the hut no aid had been sent to them, and they were now lying waiting for night, for none dared ascend the hill again, exposed to the deadly fire from the defenders. One or other of them had remained at a loophole all day. Not a shot had entered, for the Boers had fired too hastily to take accurate aim, but the roof was riddled with bullets. It was getting dusk when Peter held up his hand and listened, and then threw himself down, putting his ear to the ground.

"What is it, Peter?"

"Horsemen coming, baas, many horsemen."

Yorke ran to the other side of the hut. He could see nothing at first, for the night was fast closing in, and he had just said that in another quarter of an hour it would be dark enough to make a start, but soon he saw a dark mass which was fast approaching. For a moment he stood irresolute, then he shouted, "Hurrah! they are friends. They are riding abreast; if they were Boers, they would be riding anyhow; pull the stones away from the door."

The mass halted as he spoke, then two horsemen galloped forward towards the hut.

"Who is there?" a voice shouted in English.

Yorke opened the door and, darting out, placed himself on the side facing them. "Despatches from the Modder!" Then,

feeling certain that the Boers, two hundred yards away, would not be able to make out his figure in the gloom, he called to Peter, and together they ran forward. A number of shots were fired, but these whistled overhead. The Boers had also doubtless heard the approaching horse, and were firing in their direction, forgetting for the moment the two men who had all day kept them at bay. In a couple of minutes Yorke and Peter joined their rescuers.

"I am glad indeed to see you, sir," an officer said as he came up. "We have heard firing going on all day, and could make out that it came from this point; but as we did not know how many Boers were on the kopje we could not go out to see about it till it became dusk. Are there only you and the native?"

"That is all"

"Then we may as well be off at once, for though I don't think the Boers can make us out at this distance, we may get a stray bullet among us at any moment. Will you mount behind me?"

"Thank you! I will run alongside and keep hold of your stirrup leather."

"Very well. We will break into a walk as soon as we are out of range of those rascals, then you shall tell me the news."

He gave the order, and the troop faced round and went off at a trot, which they maintained until the Boer fire had entirely ceased.

"Tell me how you got through their lines. Is it possible that you and that native alone have kept the Boers off all day? The firing sounded heavy at times, and we thought that they must have a considerable force there. After the first outburst it was for the most part only a dropping fire."

"There were about a hundred of them I should say," Yorke answered. "I happen to be a very good shot, and the Kaffir is a very fair one, and the consequence was they very soon learned that it was death to show a head. Some mounted men came out first, but I waited till they were within two hundred yards, and four of their horses went back riderless. They did not

show again, and it has been a duel ever since between us and the men on the hillside, all the advantage being with us, as the loopholes through which we fired were but a couple of inches wide at the opening. We stopped their rush at once, and they have been in hiding ever since."

"We heard that Lord Methuen was advancing to our relief. How far is he off?"

"He crossed the Modder River the day before yesterday."

"As near as that is he?" the officer exclaimed. "Then we may indeed expect to see him soon. Was there fighting there? We thought we heard a faint rumble on that day, but it might have been thunder at a great distance."

"He has fought three battles, the first at Belmont, the second at Graspan, and the third on the Modder. The battle on the Modder was very severe, and lasted the whole day. I am afraid you won't see him here as soon as you expect. We have had upwards of a thousand casualties in the three fights. He had only about ten thousand troops with him, and after the way the Boers fought on the Modder he will not march until he is joined by the reinforcements coming up, as their position at Spytfontein is said to be very strong. I think it will be twelve days or a fortnight before he moves forward. Five or six regiments are on their way up, and some heavy naval guns. Stores are being pushed forward as fast as possible. The trains can only run during the daytime, as the Dutch along the line might at any moment pull up a few rails or blow up a culvert, so that, even if the general did not wait for reinforcements, he would have to wait for stores and ammunition. Our three batteries fired away nearly all they had, and the consumption of ball-cartridge was also very heavy."

"Then the Boers fought stoutly?"

"They fought stoutly, but as they were all in deep trenches, and we scarcely caught sight of a man during the whole time, there was no very great credit in that. We have heard from prisoners that the Free Staters were for the most part placed in rifle-pits on the south side of the river, and as this has been

dammed and rendered unfordable, they had no choice in the matter; but they did give way at last, and this compelled the whole force to fall back; the Transvaal men were never really attacked. It was only on our left that there was a possibility of our advancing."

"So we have lost a thousand altogether," the officer said—"about ten per cent of the total strength. That is pretty heavy fighting; but I suppose a considerable proportion were only wounded."

"Yes; and the doctors say that Mauser bullets do not make very serious wounds unless they hit a vital point. I know that they are quite surprised at the rapidity with which many of the wounds are healing, and that men seem to be recovering from injuries which they at first believed to be mortal. What corps is yours?"

"We are the Kimberley Light Horse. We are three hundred and fifty strong."

"I suppose you are all right here at present?"

"Oh, yes! The Boers must be fighting a great deal better against Methuen than they are doing here. They annoy us a bit by throwing shell into the town, and they have cut off the water-supply, have raided a lot of waggons and cattle, and blown up the De Beers dynamite magazine, which is a great loss, as it will put a stop to most of the work at the mines. The last was the result of the mayor's timidity about an explosion, but if the dynamite had been taken down into the mines it would have been in absolute safety.

"The water seems the most serious item."

"Well, it is not as serious as it looks. A lot of water comes into one of the mines, enough to keep a big pumping-engine at work, and anyhow there is sufficient to supply our animals with drinking water, though the authorities have had to forbid its use for watering gardens and that sort of thing. What were the first battles like?"

"They were the same in each case. The Boers were entrenched on kopjes, and as we could not leave these in rear we

had to storm them. The fighting lasted a very short time, but the Grenadiers in the first fight, and the Naval Brigade in the second, lost very heavily. The Modder was quite different. The Boers were hidden in the bushes that fringed the river, and they had on rising ground behind a number of guns. The fighting began at five o'clock in the morning, and it was not until nearly five in the evening that the regiments on our left got across the river. They maintained themselves there till dark, and the Boers, fearing that the whole force would cross in the middle of the night and cut off their retreat, retired silently, and carried off their guns. We won the passage of the river, but it was in no way a decisive victory. And so you have had no fighting yet?"

"Very little. On the 25th we made a sortie with one troop of our men and some of the Cape Police. Forty of our fellows stormed one of their redoubts, and we brought in thirty-three prisoners. That was encouraging, and though Major Scott-Turner, who commanded us, was wounded, he led us out again the day before yesterday. We could just hear a low rumble, and guessed that Methuen was fighting, so we thought it would be well to keep the Boers round here and prevent their sending reinforcements to Spytfontein, but I expect the Boers had thought that we would be likely to make some such move, for they were prepared for us. We gained ground at first, but they were soon on the spot in great force, and their rifle-fire was terrible. Poor Scott-Turner was killed and twenty-one of our fellows, and twenty-eight wounded. So it was a bad affair altogether, and I don't think we shall try any more sorties of that kind.

"If it hadn't been for that I dare say we should have come out directly we heard your firing; but after our experience of their Mauser fire, it would have been folly to get within range of an unknown strength of Boers posted on a hill. So we waited till there was a fair chance of our succouring whoever there might be without running any extraordinary risk, but we had an anxious day of it. It did not seem

that any considerable force could have got through, and yet it was evident that, whoever it was, was able to hold his ground. We could make out that little hut with the glasses, and it seemed to us that it was the point against which the Boers were firing, though at that distance we could not see the smoke of your rifles, firing as you did from the side facing the hill."

They had by this time reached the line of defence.

"Now, sir," the officer said, "if you will mount my horse one of the troopers will ride with you to the commandant's quarters, and will bring my horse back with him."

The colonel was in his office. During the greater part of the day he passed his time at the look-out at Wesselton mine. It was erected on the top of the mine head-gear, a hundred and twenty feet above the level. This lofty look-out commanded a view of the whole country round. Yorke was shown in at once.

"I have the honour to be the bearer of a despatch from Lord Methuen, sir," Yorke said as he came.

"You have managed to get through the Boers? You have done well indeed. Did you come alone?"

"I came with this Kaffir scout. He is one of a small party under my orders. He has been two years at work here, and knows the country well. I should never have got through without him, and he has stood by me most bravely all day."

"Ah! then it was your firing that we have been hearing. The officer in command of the Light Horse sent a message to say that he intended, with my permission, to go out as soon as it was dusk, to ascertain, if possible, the cause of firing, and bring off any party who might be defending themselves against the Boers. Of course I was willing that he should do so, but, anxious as we were, I could not run the risk of losing a number of men by sending out a force by daylight. Take a seat, sir, while I go through the despatch."

"The general evidently thinks," he said, when he had read it, "that we know what has been taking place outside. We

know nothing beyond the fact that a column under Lord Methuen was advancing from the Orange River station. Now, I shall be obliged if you will give me full information as to what happened between the time he left and his arrival on the Modder."

Yorke gave a full account of the movements and battles.

"The Boers are making a much stouter resistance than I expected of them," the colonel said, when the story was brought to a conclusion. "Now, tell me, if you please, how you managed to get through here."

Yorke then described his adventure.

"Very good indeed, sir; admirably done. You and your Kaffir must be good marksmen indeed to have, as you say, killed eighteen of them and wounded twelve others."

"The distance was short—not over two hundred yards. As we were in almost perfect shelter, and they had to expose themselves to fire at us, we could scarce miss hitting them. And now, sir, I have a message to give you privately. The despatch was, I think, intended to be made public, should you think fit to do so, as an encouragement to the inhabitants, and, moreover, if it fell into the enemy's hands, it could do no great harm. I have a verbal message from General Colvile, who is in command while Lord Methuen is temporarily disabled. He told me that I was to give it to you privately, as it would not be desirable that everyone should be aware of it. It was to this effect, that after the desperate resistance offered by the Boers at the Modder River, and the fact that only a portion of their force was engaged there, it is quite possible that the attack upon the very strong position they hold at Spytfontein may fail, and in that case there may be a long delay, as the attack could not be renewed until large reinforcements arrive from England. He is therefore anxious to know exactly how matters stand here—what stores and food you have, and how long you consider that you can possibly hold out. Upon that his movements will necessarily depend. If you are approaching the period when starvation would

oblige you to surrender, another effort to relieve you must at whatever cost be made; if not, he would not repeat an operation which, even if successful, can only be effected at immense loss, and might lead to his being in turn beleaguered here."

"I can quite understand his anxiety on that score," Colonel Kekewich said. "As to holding the place, I have no fear whatever. We have five hundred Lancashires, three hundred and eighty Kimberley Rifle Volunteers, ninety-five men of the Royal Artillery, and one hundred and eighteen Diamond Field Artillery. Of cavalry we have three hundred and fifty Kimberley Light Horse—they were armed and are paid by Rhodes—three hundred Cape Police, and one hundred and fifty Diamond Field Horse. Besides these, we have a town guard, which comprises the greater part of the able-bodied men, about two thousand eight hundred. So that altogether we can oppose any attack with four thousand eight hundred men, all of whom could, I am sure, be trusted to fight their best. But I do not think there is any chance of the Boers attacking us. They believe they can starve us out, and, of course, they could do so in time; but I feel sure that we can hold out for some months. The De Beers people got up a quantity of provisions before the line was cut, and a large firm at Cape Town also sent up great supplies.

"We have cattle enough to go on for some time, and when they are used up we must take to horse-flesh. I will obtain a rough account of our stores for you to-morrow. It will be best for you to learn it by heart, for if the Boers, who have, I fancy, no idea how we are supplied, were to learn the facts, they might move away for a few days to strengthen Cronje at Spytfontein; and in the event of Lord Methuen failing to break through, might see that they were but wasting their time here, and, leaving enough to keep Methuen in check, might send some five thousand men on a raid into the Colony; whereas at present we are keeping that number idle here. I suppose you won't be starting again at once?"

"No, sir; I am feeling pretty well done up, for I have not

had much sleep since the night before the attack on the Modder; and besides, I should like to see the defences, so that I could explain the situation to Lord Methuen."

"I will lend you a copy of my plans, Mr. Harberton. I say lend, because it would not do for you to take it out of here, for it would be very valuable to the Boers if it were to fall into their hands. I will place a horse at your disposal to-morrow. I am sorry to have kept you talking all this time; you must be famished."

"No, indeed, sir. I brought a tin of meat and some bread out with me."

"Ah, well, you will be all the better for dinner, and mine must be ready by this time. I hope you will join me. There is a bed upstairs at your disposal. I will tell them to give your boy something to eat too."

As soon as dinner was over, Yorke went to bed and slept till next morning, when, obtaining a permit, signed by the commandant, authorizing him to go wherever he pleased, he made a tour of the forts round the town. Several of these were placed on the great heaps of debris from the mines, and commanded a wide view over the country. These heaps were very steep on the outward face, and it had not been deemed necessary to erect any serious works on the crests, but breast-works of stone had been thrown up to protect the men from rifle-fire should the Boers venture to make an attack. The ground round the town had been cleared of the houses which would interfere with the line of fire. Native huts had all been levelled, and the bushes cleared away, so that the enemy would have to cross the open and be exposed to musketry and artillery fire. This was a great advantage from the point of view of defence; but on the other hand, it was an equal disadvantage to the British when they made sorties against the enemy, as the latter could lie hidden among the bushes, while our men had to advance across the open.

Search-lights had been established on the lofty top of one of the mine-works, and at night swept the circle of cleared

ground, so that it was impossible for the Boers to crawl up to make a sudden attack. Barricades had been formed across all the streets leading out of the town, and no one was allowed to pass in or out after nightfall. It was hoped that in this way the Boer sympathizers in the town would not be able to carry news to their friends outside. In spite of these precautions, however, there is no doubt that throughout the siege the enemy were aware of all that was done. In the town itself there were few visible signs of the bombardment, though here and there a house in ruins showed that a shell had burst inside. The town was full of people, for although some of the wealthiest men had left before the siege began, their places were filled by hundreds who came in from the houses outside the line that was to be held, and from the farming stations in the surrounding country.

Many, too, had moved in from the outlying suburb of Kenilworth, and from that part of Beaconsfield which would be most exposed to the fire of the Boer guns. Numbers of Kaffirs had also come in. So far, the bombardment had effected comparatively little damage, for the Boers had not as yet brought up their big guns. Nevertheless, most of the inhabitants had erected some sort of shelter, with bags filled with earth, and roofed with timber, over which more sandbags were placed. Underground shelters could not well be constructed, for the soil was but eighteen inches deep, and below it was the solid rock. It was intended that directly the enemy began the bombardment in earnest with heavier guns, the women and children should be lowered into the mines, where they would be perfectly safe from harm.

Yorke was out the whole day taking notes of everything he saw, in order to be able to report as fully as possible. He was accosted by many officers, and warmly invited into their mess-rooms. He could not refuse these invitations, as he knew how intensely anxious all were to hear the news from outside, and especially the accounts of the fighting. He took Peter with him on his rounds, pointing out everything to him,

so that if he himself were captured on his way out, and the Kaffir escaped, he would be able to give as much information as possible to the general. On returning to dinner at the commandant's, he found the list of the stores in readiness.

"You understand this is only approximate, Mr. Harberton. A great many of the residents have stores of their own; having, as soon as it was evident that we were going to be cut off, bought a large supply from the storekeepers for their own use. As you will see, the only item in which we are likely to fail is preserved milk. Unfortunately the Boers managed to drive off all our milch cows a day or two after they closed in, and we have only the tins left to rely upon. It is not of much importance to the men, but were the supply to run out, I fear it would be very trying for the young children. With that exception you will see we are fairly supplied for three months, possibly for longer, as, of course, the rations will be reduced if we find that we are not relieved."

Yorke spent two or three hours that evening learning by heart the items of the list. Then he put the figures down in the order in which they stood. These without a key would furnish no information, and he had no fear of forgetting what each group referred to. In the morning he asked the colonel which side of the town he considered would offer the best chance of getting through unobserved.

"Do you mean to go on foot or on horseback? Of course I will furnish you with two horses if you decide on riding."

"I should be glad of them if I were once through the Boers, sir; but there would be so much greater chance of my being seen if mounted, that I should much prefer going on foot."

"I think you are right. In any case, it will be best for you to make to the north-east, leaving by the road to Boshof, which goes out close to the De Beers mine. The Boers have an entrenchment on Tarantaalrand Kop, on its right, and one on Tafel Kop, on its left; but they are less likely to be watchful on that side than they are on the south or west, as it

would be in those directions that any messenger or despatch-rider would be most likely to go. What time do you propose starting?"

"At nine o'clock, sir. It will be quite dark by that time."

"Very well; then I will get a troop of cavalry to go out towards Kamfers Dam, and will open fire from the guns on that side. Of course they will be told not to push the attack home, but to retire as soon as the Boers begin to fire hotly. In that way the attention of the Boers on the kopjes you have to pass will be attracted, and you will have a better chance of getting through unseen. I will, of course, order that the search-light shall not be directed near the road that you are travelling, but it shall play frequently on the two kopjes; the beam will pretty nearly blind the men up there. The best eyes cannot stand the glare of a search-light long, and when it is turned off, can see nothing for some time. So I think that, what with that and the attack on the other side, you will be able to make your way through, if you have luck. Of course you will not go as far as Boshof, and once past their lines, you will journey due south. In that way you will strike the Boshof and Jacobsdal road. When you do so, your course will be west with a little south, which will lead you into your camp without going near their lines at Spytfontein and Magersfontein. You had better have a good look at my map. It is not as accurate as it ought to be, but it will at least be of some assistance to you. Have you a compass?"

"Yes, sir; but it is of no use at night unless one is quite sure that there are no Boers near, as the striking of a match may be seen a very long way."

"I will give you some American matches. They are beastly things, with a lot of sulphur in them, but they have the advantage that they do not strike with a sudden flash like most English matches, especially the safety-matches. There is only just enough phosphorus to light the sulphur, but, without allowing the flame to catch the wood, they will give

enough light to let you see your compass. I don't say that it would be safe to strike one of them if there was a Boer within a hundred yards. But I do not think that the light would be seen half a mile away, especially as you would naturally strike it in the heart of a bush or the shelter of a clump of rocks. Of course there is no chance of your getting back to camp before daylight, for the morning begins to break soon after five o'clock."

"Thank you, sir! I shall be very much obliged for the matches; they would certainly prove most useful."

Yorke did not care to walk about much, as he had a hard night's work before him, and he spent the day in one of the forts which was exchanging an occasional shot with a Boer battery, chatting with the officer in command.

"The Boers are shocking bad shots," the latter said. "You are in much more danger of being hit when they are not firing at you than when they are aiming at you. They direct their fire principally at Wesselton Mine, in the hope, no doubt, that shells will go down the pit and damage the pumping-gear, for if they could succeed we should find it very difficult to maintain our water-supply, as it would all have to be carried up from the mine by hand. Not a single shot has fallen within a hundred yards of it. They have damaged the houses a good deal in the line of fire, but they have never been able to give their guns the right elevation. I fancy their powder is by no means good, and is very uneven in quality. Sometimes it will carry a good deal beyond the mine, and at other times falls short of it."

"You have a good supply of shell, have you not?"

"Yes, a very fair supply; and the De Beers people have begun casting some, and have turned out some very fair specimens. They are rougher than British work, no doubt, but they serve the purpose very well, and we can make as good practice with them as with our own. Ah, here comes the man himself! He often comes up here for a look-out. I don't think he gets on very well with the commandant, but the

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"YORKE GAVE A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLES"

people here swear by him, and his presence is an immense encouragement to us all; and there can be no doubt that with the resources he has at his back, with a whole army of well-trained mechanics of all sorts, and machinery, to say nothing of his miners and Kaffirs, he is a host in himself."

As he spoke Rhodes himself came up. Yorke looked with interest at the man who is the Napoleon of South Africa—a square-built man, with a smoothly shaven face except for a thick moustache, with hair waving back from a broad forehead, strong and determined chin and mouth, somewhat broad in the cheeks, giving his face the appearance of squareness, light eyes, keen but kindly; altogether a strong and pleasant face.

"Good-morning!" he said to the officer; "things seem pretty quiet to-day. Our fight three days back could not be called a success in itself, but it must have given the Boers a higher respect for our fighting powers, and made them dislike more than ever the idea of trying to attack us. I do not think I know your face, sir," he went on, turning to Yorke. "I thought I knew all the officers in the place."

"I only came in the day before yesterday, in the evening, bringing despatches from Lord Methuen to Colonel Kekewich."

"A gallant action, sir," Mr. Rhodes said, holding out his hand to him. "Of course I heard about it, and of your plucky defence all day till the Kimberley Horse went out and brought you in. I heard at the mess of the Diamond Field Horse yesterday that you had been there an hour before, and given them an account of Lord Methuen's three battles. If you have nothing better to do, sir, perhaps you will kindly tell me the story. We had better sit down on these sand-bags. The commandant sent me a copy of your report, but that, of course, gave no details."

Yorke gave a full account of the battles.

"It does not seem to me," Mr. Rhodes said when he had finished, "that there can be sufficient scouting. Of course I am not a military man, and know nothing of the handling of the troops. But certainly before attacking a place I should

have taken steps to find out the exact position of the enemy, and, as far as possible, their strength. This could have been done by a handful of mounted men. Now, tell me a little more as to how you got through."

Yorke much more briefly gave the account of his journey.

"And now, Mr. Harberton—for such, I hear, is your name—will you tell me how it comes that so young an officer was entrusted with such hazardous work. First of all, would you mind telling me something about yourself. I like to know the ins and outs of things. Believe me, I am not asking from mere curiosity."

Yorke felt that in this strong able man he might find a valuable friend, therefore he gave him a sketch of his reasons for leaving England.

"So you were at Rugby!" his hearer broke in. "I am a public-school boy myself, you know, and there is always a fellow-feeling among public-school boys, even if they were not at the same school. You came out to a cousin, you say, and that is some eight months ago. What did you do with him?"

"I looked after his farm a bit, but the greater part of my time I spent in learning to shoot and to speak Dutch."

"Do you speak Dutch well?"

"Well enough to pass in ordinary conversation, sir. I had a Dutch boy as a companion, and as my cousin's wife was Dutch, that language was principally spoken in the house."

"And why did you leave?"

"I should have gone anyhow, sir, because, from what I heard from the Dutch who came there, there was certain to be war; and as I could ride well, had made myself a good shot, and could speak Dutch and a little Kaffir, I thought I might be useful in the scouting way. If I had not been able to enlist in such a corps I should have enlisted, if possible, in the regular cavalry. But I left suddenly. I was shot at by a young Boer, a relation of my cousin's wife, who was jealous because I had beaten him in a shooting match. His ball went through my hat, and I naturally fired back in return,

and the bullet struck him in the chest. They did not think that the wound would be mortal, but my cousin thought it better that I should go at once, as the fellow had many friends round him who would certainly take the matter up."

Then he related how he had obtained a commission in the latter corps, and had gone up with Colonel Pinkerton; and had ridden out dressed as a Dutchman, as they went up the line, to obtain information as to the sentiments of the Africanders; and how in the same disguise he had gone, with the Dutch lad who had accompanied him, among the Boers, and had learned that the commando was going south, and that there was no intention of attacking De Aar; how twenty Kaffirs had been placed under him, and had done what scouting was possible on the way up to the Modder.

"I see that you have plenty of intelligence as well as grit, Mr. Harberton. When this war is over come to me; you are the sort of man I want, and I promise you that you will find me a good friend."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

"No, you have to thank yourself," Mr. Rhodes said. "A lad who will learn Dutch in six months, instead of contenting himself with sporting and amusement, as too many young fellows who come out here do, who will undertake dangerous enterprises, and carry them through as successfully as you have done, is certain, in any case, to make his way, and deserves to do so. I am a hard worker myself, and I am only too glad to have men round me with clear heads, a capacity for work, and, in a pinch, plenty of pluck and decision. All these you have shown. You have come out at a younger age than most men, and have already highly distinguished yourself. Don't be foolish and take a commission if it is offered to you, at any rate not for a permanency. It is a poor business, and unless you have an income of your own, it would be as much as you could do to keep your head above water until the time when you might become a captain. In Rhodesia you will by that time be in a position that a colonel might envy."

"Thank you, sir! I had no thought of taking a commission where I could render but little service except as an interpreter, and did I take it I should certainly resign at the end of the war. I came out here to push my way, and be able to help my mother and sisters to some extent, in the event of the death of my father, whose income as a clergyman will, of course, expire with him, and who can now only afford to insure his life for a small sum. Therefore I most gratefully accept your very kind offer, and when this business is ended will come to you, and be only too glad to accept any post that you may think me fit for."

They had been alone during this conversation, as the officer in command of the battery had left them to attend to his duties when they first sat down to talk. Mr. Rhodes now rose and shook hands with Yorke; then, nodding to the officer, said, "I shall be up again this afternoon if the Boers make any fresh move," and strolled away. Yorke dined that evening at the mess of the Kimberley Horse, but left directly the cloth was removed, and having said good-bye to Colonel Kekewich, started with Peter, an officer accompanying them to pass them out through the lines. Already there was a sound of musketry away near Kamfers Dam; the Boer guns joined in, and the battery at which he had passed the morning replied to their fire.

"That will occupy their attention on the kopje near this road, Peter. We will keep along close to it as far as we can. It is all open veldt, and as far as I can make out, the foot of the kopjes is at least two or three hundred yards from it, so that walking will be a good deal easier than it was coming here. But mind, if we are surprised, Peter, you are to follow my orders and make a bolt for it at once. As long as the ground is open like this I can use my own eyes, and I wish you now to fall back and walk thirty or forty yards behind me. It is of no use our both being captured. I have given you a copy of the figures that I have put down, and have gone through them over and over again

with you, so that you know what each of them means. I have also told you the message Colonel Kekewich sent me, which you are to repeat to the general when you get back to the Modder. When we have got well past the kopjes you can come up to me again, but until we do so keep well behind, and if I am suddenly pounced upon make straight off. We have agreed that you can follow me and help me if there is a chance of making my escape, but I hardly think that such a chance would occur. However, that I must leave to you. But you must remember that you are not to follow me long, not more than a day or two, for it is all-important that the message should get to the Modder as soon as possible."

"If it is your orders, I must obey them," the Kaffir said, "but I don't like it, baas."

"Never mind that, Peter; we all have to do things we don't like sometimes. Now, drop back."

Yorke had before leaving the lines again muffled his boots, and he walked along fast, feeling confident that he should get through unobserved. He was walking close to the road, and was within four or five hundred yards of the kopjes, when he took to it again, as there were some clumps of bushes in front of him. Suddenly he fell on his face with a crash, his foot having caught against a wire stretched tightly some six inches above the ground. Before he could spring to his feet a dozen men rushed out from the bushes and seized him.

"Run, Peter, run!" he shouted; and then said, as the Boers raised him to his feet, "I surrender."

Several of them raised their rifles and faced towards the road by which he had come, thinking that he might be followed by a strong force. After waiting for three or four minutes two of them ran forward cautiously, but returned in five minutes, saying that there was no sign of anyone there.

"But this man shouted to someone. Whom did you shout to?" he asked Yorke roughly.

Yorke shook his head. He thought it best to profess ignorance of Dutch. The man repeated the question in English.

"It was a Kaffir," Yorke answered. "He was coming to show me the way across the country when we had passed through your lines."

"You are a spy, then," the man said fiercely.

"Not at all," Yorke replied. "If it were daylight you could see by my uniform that I am an English officer. If I had come as a spy I should have disguised myself. But I preferred coming in uniform, so that if I were captured I should have a right to be treated as a prisoner of war."

"That is for the field cornet to decide," the man said grimly. "Now, come along with us."

CHAPTER X

AN ESCAPE

HAVING relieved him of his rifle and bandolier, the Boers led Yorke with them along the road until they had passed the kopje, and then turned off to the left and took him to where several fires were burning at the back of the hill. A strong party of Boers were sitting round, some smoking, others eating their supper.

"Whom have you got here, le Clus?" enquired one of them with a white cockade in his hat.

"He says that he is a British officer, mynheer. He was coming along the road when he tumbled over our wire, and we had him in a moment."

"He was walking along the road, was he?"

"Yes."

"Then he can hardly have been sent to spy out our position and strength," the man said. "If he had been, he would not have kept to the road. Why, he is quite a boy!"

M 839

"A STRONG PARTY OF BOERS WERE SITTING ROUND, SOME SMOKING, OTHERS EATING THEIR SUPPER"

"He says he is not a spy, mynheer, but has been sent out to carry a message to the British on the Modder. He claims to be in uniform, and so to be treated as a prisoner of war."

The conversation had been in Dutch, and the field cornet now said in English to the prisoner, "Have you any papers about you?"

"I have only this little scrap," Yorke said. "It is written in a cipher, and I suppose the English general will understand. It is only a lot of figures."

The Boer opened it and held it so that the light of the fires should fall upon it. "3104, 8660, 241. It is like that all the way down. Do you understand the cipher?" he asked.

"As it is a military cipher, it is only the generals who would know it. These things are kept very secret, and no cipher would be told to a young officer like myself."

"Why should they choose you to carry it?"

"I can only suppose," Yorke said with a smile, "because they thought that I could be better spared than older officers. Besides, I am a good runner, and would bet that if I had twenty yards start none of your men would overtake me."

"Perhaps not, my lad, but a rifle bullet would travel faster than you."

There was a laugh among the Boers standing round, which was what Yorke had aimed at, knowing the importance of keeping them in good temper.

"Well, in the morning I shall send you on to Boshof," the field cornet said. "I do not know anything of the usages of war, and whether your uniform will save your skin or not I will leave it to others to settle. But you must be a bold young fellow to have undertaken such a job, for it is ridiculous to suppose that you could get through in that uniform, and you would probably be shot by the first of our men you met without his stopping to ask any questions. Will you give me your word that you will not try to escape to-night? If so, I will not tie you up."

Two or three of the men grumbled. "I know these English

officers," he said, "and am willing to take his word. Still, to prevent any risks, two of you must take it by turns to watch him."

Yorke looked indifferent till he spoke to him in English, and then said, "I will give you my word of honour, sir, not to attempt to escape to-night, but I don't say that if I can get a chance afterwards I won't do so."

"That is all right. I don't think you will get a chance. At any rate, I accept your word that you will remain here quietly all night."

So saying, he reseated himself by the fire and began to puff at his pipe. Yorke thought it would be best to imitate his example. He had, when at the farm, taken to smoking occasionally; he did it in self-defence, for sometimes, when there were several Dutch visitors, the room was so full of smoke that he could scarcely breathe in it. He therefore took out his pipe, filled and lit it, and sat quietly down near the field cornet. He then took from his pocket a flask, which had been filled for him at the mess with whisky, and handed it to the cornet. The Boer's eyes twinkled, and he took a long draught of it.

"That is good stuff," he said, "a good deal better than they sell us at your stores."

"Please pass it round, cornet. I am afraid it won't go very far, but you are heartily welcome to it. I don't drink it myself, but I generally carry it in case I should get hurt anyhow, or sprain my ankle among your rocks. I may as well hand you this pistol too," Yorke said—it had been unnoticed in the dark by the men who had taken his rifle—"it is certain that your people will not let me keep it, and you may as well have it as another; but I do not suppose your cartridges will fit it." He had dropped his own on the way.

"As you say, I may as well have it as another," the field cornet said, taking it. "Besides, it might go off by the way, and it is well to avoid the possibility of accidents. Now, as you have given me your word of honour that you will not

try to escape to-night, will you assure me, on your word of honour, that you have not come out to gather information —in fact, that you are not a spy?"

"Willingly, sir. I give you my word of honour that I am not sent out on any such mission. I was simply told to make my way to the Modder, and, so far from trying to make out your arrangements, my great object was to try to avoid coming near any of you."

"What he says is true, I am certain," the Boer said in Dutch to his companions. "I am sure by his face that he is not lying. It is a shame to have sent a lad like this on such an errand. However, I will send a strong letter with him in the morning to the commandant at Boshof, and assure him that there is no question whatever that this young officer's story is true, and that he is entitled to be treated as a prisoner of war. We have not gone into this fight in order to kill as many Englishmen as possible, but because we want to help our friends of the Transvaal to keep their independence; and I for one hope that there will be no more bloodshed than necessary. Young fellows like this simply do what they are ordered, just as we do.

"Of course we both do our best when we are fighting. Certainly we have no ground for animosity against England; she has always kept her engagements with us, and we have been just as independent as if there were no one in South Africa but ourselves. We have always been good friends with the English who live among us. Once it comes to killing spies they could kill a hundred of our men to every one we could kill. We know everything that passes in Natal or Cape Colony from our friends there, and it is only natural that they should want to know what is passing among us. If we shoot a man on the ground that he is a spy, they may shoot hundreds of Dutch, who are sending us news from among them. We have not heard of their shooting one; and I say if we find an Englishman doing what so many of our men are doing, let us stop his work by imprisoning him until

the war is over. If the Transvaalers like to act differently we cannot help it. They hate the English. Why, I don't know, for they have all got rich at their expense. Still, they do hate them.

"Before this began I was as good friends with my English neighbours as I was with my own people, and I see no reason for any change. They are not fighting us; it is we who are fighting them. I don't say that Steyn was wrong in joining our kinsmen across the Vaal; that is his business and that of the men we elected. Anyhow, we are bound by them; we and the Rooineks have got to shoot each other till one of us gives in. I am sure we shall all do our best to win. We have shown them that we can fight, and they have shown us that they can fight; but when it comes to shooting in cold blood I will have nothing to do with it. In the first place, because I call it murder; and in the second, because where the English have got one man sending them information from our side, we have got a thousand doing the same from theirs. We should be fools indeed if we were to set an example and take one life, for our action might entail the shooting of all our friends in the colonies."

"There is a good deal in what you say, mynheer," one of the others agreed, "and I am sure you are right. For my part, when I see our shell bursting in there, I often say to myself, 'It is the women and children that are suffering from this.' Let us fire at their forts—though I don't see that that does much good—but leave the peaceful people alone; they won't give in because a few hundred women are killed. It does not seem as if we should take the town by force. At any rate, we have made no attempt to do so at present, and are not likely to. We shall starve them into surrender, and might just as well leave them alone till they have eaten their last crust. For my part, I think we ought to have made a rush and finished the business directly we got here. We should have lost a good many men, but that would have been the end of it. The end will come just the same, but we shall

have killed many women and children and some soldiers, and we shall have lost in the long run as many as we should have done if we had attacked the place before they had time to build their forts and prepare for us."

"I don't see the use of keeping up this fire myself, Isaak," the field cornet said; "but again, that is not my business, my orders are to hold this kopje, and I mean to do so. My heart aches whenever I see a shell burst in the middle of the town, but our commandant has got to account for that, not I. It is time now for the men on the hill to be relieved, and let the next two to go on guard duty get their rifles, and keep watch over this lad. I have no fear of his trying to escape; but you say he had another with him, for all that we know there may have been three or four, and they may try to crawl in and get him off."

The idea that Peter might attempt this had already occurred to Yorke, and he sincerely hoped that the Kaffir would not do so. One of the men brought an armful of straw and put it down for him between two rocks. Here he lay down. The two men told off sat themselves on the ground in front of him after lighting their pipes, and in a short time all was quiet. Yorke soon went off to sleep. In the middle of the night he was startled by one of his guards leaping to his feet and shouting "Who's there?"

"What is it, Jans?" the other said.

"I heard the rattle of a stone over there on the right;" and he again challenged.

No answer came.

"It was only a hare," the other grumbled. "Don't fire, Jans, whatever you do. We shall be rousing everybody, and a nice temper they would be in with you for disturbing them."

"I don't believe it was a hare," the other said. "It sounded like a rock that had shifted its place when someone trod on it. It was too big a stone to move with the weight of a hare. Well, if I hear anything else I will send a bullet in that direction, whether it wakes the camp or not. You heard what the

field cornet said. Someone may be trying to get in to help this lad to escape."

Yorke lay awake for some time, and then, as everything remained quiet, he went off to sleep again. In the morning he breakfasted with the field cornet, and had a bowl of cocoa and milk, with bread broken into it.

"Now," the latter said when he had finished, "I must send you on to Boshof. If I could have my own way, lad, I would send you back into the town, and you could tell them there that we are keeping a sharp look-out, and that it is of no use anyone trying to get through. But I can't do that; I must send you off to Boshof. Four of my men have to go there to buy provisions, and they will look after you. I have written a letter to the commandant, and hope that he will treat you well. They won't be starting until this afternoon, as they will sleep there and come back in the morning. Of course they will ride, and you can have one of my ponies. Mind," he went on with a smile, "it will be the slowest of the lot I have, for your promise not to escape expired this morning. The four men will all be on better ponies than yours, so it will be of no use your trying to get off."

"I sha'n't try," Yorke laughed; "even if they could not overtake me, they could shoot my pony. I don't want to be made a target for four of your rifles. My chance has not arrived yet. When it does, I shall take it."

At three o'clock the party started, the field cornet shaking hands warmly with Yorke, and saying as he mounted: "I am sorry we caught you, lad. You could have done us no harm if you had got round to your people at the Modder. Though, perhaps, you are lucky in not being able to get farther, for you might fall into the hands of the Transvaalers, and although they are our friends, I must acknowledge that they are a pretty rough lot."

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, for you have treated me as well as our men would have treated you if you had fallen into their hands."

A minute later he was riding along the road with two of the Boers on each side of him. The distance was some five-and-twenty miles, and, sometimes walking, sometimes cantering, they reached the town between six and seven. Yorke had chatted cheerfully to one of his guards, who spoke English, feeling apparently but little anxiety as to his position.

"Where do you suppose they will send me?" he asked.

"The orders are to send all prisoners to Pretoria; but most likely, in the first place, they will send you to Bloemfontein, and from there you can be taken up by rail. All the prisoners taken in Natal are sent up that way—not, of course, through Bloemfontein, but by the line through Standerton. I don't suppose you will be there very long, for, of course, as soon as we have driven all your soldiers out of the country, we shall send the prisoners after them."

"Don't count your chickens before they are hatched," Yorke laughed. "The war has been going on two months, and you have not done much towards it yet."

"No," one of the guard admitted, "but we have killed thousands and thousands of your troops in Natal, and we shall finish with those on the Modder directly they advance again. All our people in Cape Colony are only waiting for orders, when they will rise to a man. We are expecting every day to hear that Ladysmith has fallen. Then Joubert will drive your people to take to their ships at Durban. We shall leave enough men here to starve your garrison, and shall then march to Cape Town with the Transvaalers. We don't expect any fighting on the way, because our people will have risen and captured the place long before we arrive there."

"It all sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But at present, you see, you have not taken Ladysmith; you have not defeated Buller's army; you have not starved Kimberley; you have not even taken Mafeking; and the Dutch in Cape Colony have not risen. When all these things have happened, you may find it clear sailing. But you must remember that, although you were all prepared for war, Britain was not. At

present we have not more than fifty thousand men here, and you have found it difficult to deal with them. She could send, and will send, if necessary, five hundred thousand more."

"That would be a big lot," the Boer said doubtfully; "but with the Dutch in Cape Colony we should not be afraid of them."

"Well, you have seen that they can fight, anyhow," Yorke said. "You have the advantage in all being mounted, and in the nature of the country; that is all in your favour while we are attacking you, but it would be in our favour were you attacking us. Besides, I don't see what you men of the Free State have to do with it. If we were driven out, and you had a republic, Kruger would be the president, and the Transvaal the master. You were a great deal better off as you were. You know, everyone knows, how hard their government is. Kruger and his people would keep all the riches for themselves. Do you think that you would get a higher price for your cattle, and would be in any way better off for the change?

"I think that you would not; there would be monopolies of everything, as in the Transvaal. You would have to pay twice as much for the goods you wanted to buy as you do now. Perhaps you do not know the story of the monkey who took a cat and made it pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him. Well, I think that if you drive us out of South Africa, you will find that the Transvaal would be the monkey, and the Free State the cat. If we win, which is possible, unlikely as it seems to you, you will certainly lose your independence, for, without a shadow of cause of complaint, you have wantonly taking up arms against us. You will have lost a great number of lives, and be worse off than you were at the beginning, though nothing like so badly off as if you had been under Kruger. You know very well that under our rule the Dutch in Cape Colony have nothing to complain of. The government are Dutch, the Dutch have as free a voice as the English in electing their assembly and making their own

laws; and we may be sure that were the Free State annexed, you would, after a time, be as free as are the Dutch in our colony."

"It is a bad business," one of the men said. "I wish Steyn and Reitz had been anywhere before they dragged us into it. However, now we are in it, we have got to go through with it, but I can tell you a good many of us would not have come out on commando but that we had to choose between doing so and being shot. Well, I hope that it will soon be over one way or other, and that I can get back to my farm."

"Who is commandant at Boshof? Is he a Transvaaler or a Free Stater?"

"One of our people. He is a good man, and is a brother-in-law of our field cornet. Most of us are Free State men about here. Many of those round Kimberley, and two-thirds of those at Spytfontein, are Transvaalers, but the main part of their force is in Natal."

Then the subject of the conversation was changed. The Boers asked many questions about Britain, showing astounding ignorance of its distance from the Cape, and the population.

"But Russia, Germany, and France are all going to invade Britain," the Boer said, "and I hear that they are going to divide it between them; so what you say about so many troops coming over here is all nonsense."

Yorke laughed. "There is no more chance of those three countries combining against us than there is of their flying; but if they did, we should not be afraid of them."

"Why, I hear that they have all got very much bigger armies than you have."

"That is true enough; but our navy is larger than all theirs put together, and they would have to thrash that before they could do anything."

"Why couldn't they march their armies into England and leave your fleet alone?"

"Because Britain is an island, and there are more than twenty miles between it and the nearest point of France; so

that as long as our fleet is master of the sea, they can do nothing. Even if they did beat our fleet, they would have to get ships to cross in. It requires a tremendous number of ships to carry a big army with horses, artillery, and stores. All the ships of France collected at one spot could not carry an army across capable of beating ours. Russia has practically no ships at all, so her troops could do nothing; and at the worst, although Germany could send more men over than France, there is no need to fear her, for she would never join France and Russia against us. She is not good friends with France, and not very good friends with Russia; and if Britain were conquered, France and Russia would next turn their attention to her. Russia and France might join against us. Russia could do us no harm in Europe, and could not aid France in any way except by attacking us in India. So, practically, France is the only power that could, if she wanted to, help you. And as we could smash her fleet up in a month after war began, she would have nothing to gain and everything to lose by siding with you. At present, however, she has not the slightest idea of doing anything of the sort. It is nothing to her whether the Transvaal is independent or not. She has large interests in the gold-mines, and would lose a great deal of money if the Boers were successful."

"We have Frenchmen fighting for us, and Germans."

"No doubt you have; but in every country there are a certain number of people ready to fight anywhere, if they are paid for what they do. The sort of men who are fighting for you, would rob your farms just as readily as they are robbing the farms of British settlers; they are the scum of France and Germany, and will be a source of more trouble than advantage to you. Don't build your hopes on foreign assistance, you have yourselves to depend upon and yourselves only. As long as Kruger can lay his hand on all the gold from the mines, he can buy men and guns from Europe; but that won't last, for most of the miners have gone, and once we take Johannesburg there is an end to that."

"You will never do that."

"That is for the future to show," Yorke said. "You thought that we should never cross the Modder, but we have done it. You thought that you were going to march to Durban a fortnight after the war began, but you have not done it. You thought that you were going to take Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking in a week, but you have done none of these things yet. So you see the unexpected happens sometimes; and my opinion, though I may be wrong, is, that in three months we shall be at Johannesburg. But we have an old saying in England, 'May difference of opinion never alter friendship!' and there is no reason why we should not each enjoy our own opinion without quarrelling about it. You and the British have always been good friends and have got on comfortably, and there is no reason why you should not do so again, when these troubles are over."

On arriving at Boshof they found that the commandant had ridden over to his farm, five-and-twenty miles away, and would not be back until eight or nine o'clock. The place was about the usual size of country towns in the Free State. It contained a church, a town-hall, a school, and perhaps two hundred houses. The inhabitants speedily gathered as the party rode in, eagerly asking for news as to the progress of the siege. Some of the men looked sullenly and threateningly at Yorke, but for the most part little animosity was evinced, many of the women even looked with pity towards him. Among the population the war was regarded as practically over, for they had been told that Buller's army had been annihilated and that tremendous losses had been inflicted upon Methuen, with only about half a dozen casualties among their own men, and had heard that the capture ot Britain herself by Russia, if not already accomplished, was but a matter of days. They were a little puzzled why Kimberley had not yet fallen, but were confident that the final attack upon it was only deferred until Methuen's army was annihilated.

Here was a specimen of the men with whom their own big

and brawny relatives had to fight—a mere lad, without a hair on his face, who ought to be at home with his mother. No wonder the Boers had gained such magnificent victories. It was nothing short of madness that such soldiers should be sent to fight against the invincible champions of their country. It was not their fault, poor fellows, for had not authentic reports reached the town showing how the British soldiers had had to be ironed and intoxicated before they could be got on board a ship, and how many had cried like children at being compelled to fight so far away from home. Therefore, when Yorke was lodged in the lock-up of the town, one woman brought a bowl of milk to the barred window, another some fruit, and a third a plate of meat and some bread, for they believed that, having come from Kimberley, he must be in a state of starvation, while many said a word or two of pity and consolation. Although he pretended not to understand their words, Yorke was touched and at the same time amused by their comments.

"Poor young fellow," one said, "I don't suppose he is much younger than my Paul, though he is not half his size; they must be very hard up for soldiers when they take a lad like this."

"The men who brought him in said that he was an officer," one of them said.

"An officer!" the other repeated in surprise, "no wonder we beat them so easily, when they have boys like that as officers. Why, all our field cornets and officers are big men, and the wisest in their districts; what chance could such a lad have against them? And if this is an officer, what must the soldiers be like?"

Several times the two men on guard outside the door told the women to go away, but they soon returned.

"I wonder what has become of Peter," Yorke thought to himself. "I expect he was on the look-out somewhere among the rocks this morning, and waited there till he saw me ride by. He would know that he could do nothing against four

mounted men. I hope that by this time he is well on his way towards the Modder. As they say the landdrost here is a good fellow, and a brother-in-law of my friend of last night, I don't think there is any chance of harsh treatment; and by the time I have gone another stage all questions about my being a spy will have died out, and it will be supposed that I was captured in a sortie or something of that sort."

At nine o'clock the key grated in the lock, and, the door opening, the two Boers on guard told him to follow them. He was conducted to a small room, where the landdrost and two or three of his friends were seated.

"So you brought this man here prisoner; you caught him trying to get out of Kimberley? I hear you have a letter for me?"

"Yes, mynheer, here it is!"

He read it through and then passed it to his companions.

"A young chap trying to carry a despatch," he said, "walked right into the arms of Odental's men. He had no time to make resistance—not that it would have done him any good. There is evidently nothing to do but to send him to Pretoria."

"You feel sure that he is not a spy, landdrost?"

"As if people would send out a lad like that as a spy! He is evidently just fresh from England. What could he want to spy about? The people in Kimberley can see for themselves where our forts are; if they wanted to send out a spy they would have chosen somebody who could speak Dutch. Besides, he has got his uniform on, the first Dutchman he met would have made him prisoner. You need not wait any longer," he went on to the men who had brought Yorke in, "I will give you a letter in the morning, to my brother. Now, sit down, young fellow, and tell us who you are, and how you came to undertake this business. How long have you been out from England?"

"Seven or eight months."

"I suppose you were with your regiment at Cape Town?"

"I joined it there," Yorke said, "but I did not come up the country with it. I am a good runner and a fair rider, so I volunteered to come up to Kimberley. As the war seemed likely to last some time, and I wanted to join my regiment, I got leave from the commandant there to make off, and, as Field Cornet Odental no doubt told you, he entrusted me with a despatch; this I gave to the field cornet, as I knew that I should be searched; besides, it was necessary to show that I was going out on military business, and not as a spy. But it contained only a number of figures, which may have referred to certain words in a book, or been a military cipher, that no one but the writer could understand."

"They would be sure to write in cipher," the landdrost said; "it would not have been safe to send a message that we could read, if we caught you."

The landdrost had been warm when he returned from his ride and had thrown up the window. Suddenly a rifle was thrust in, and a voice in Dutch called out, "Hold up your arms or we shoot!"

The men, astounded at this sudden threat, did as they were ordered.

"Gentlemen," Yorke said quietly, "I suppose that some of my friends have heard of my capture, and that a party has got through. I am heartily obliged to you for your kindness, landdrost, and I only leave you because the journey back from here is a good deal shorter than it would be from Pretoria. I will take your guns for the present, but you will find four of them outside after I have gone; the other I may want on the journey. Good-evening!" And taking the five guns from the corner in which they were placed, he carried them out, shut the door, and turned the key. He paused a moment outside, extracted the cartridges from four of them, removed the bolts and put them in his pocket; the other, and a bandolier, he slung over his shoulder.

"Thank you, men!" he said in a loud voice. "Now, then, I will shut the window down. One man had better stand on

each side of it, and if anyone attempts to open it or come out, put a bullet in his head."

He then closed the window. He did this because, had Peter stepped forward to do it, the Boers would have seen that he was a Kaffir. As soon as he had done it he said, "Thank you, Peter! Now, which way?"

"Round the corner of the next house, baas. Now, you follow me. I know all the streets. No fear of my tumbling over wire;" and he laughed. They started at full speed, took several turnings, and in three minutes were outside the town. Before they got there, however, they heard a loud shouting.

"They have gone to a back window, or perhaps to one upstairs. They would be sure to think of that when they got over the shock. Are we going right for the Modder?"

"Yes, baas, this is the way. But the sky is very dark. There is going to be a storm, I think. I am afraid we shall not be able to go very straight."

"That does not matter, Peter. I have still got my compass and matches. I had them in my tobacco-pouch. That and a handkerchief are the only things they left me. You managed that splendidly, Peter. You did well not to show yourself in the light. They would have been so furious to think that they have been held up by a native, that even your rifle would not have kept them quiet."

"I could have shot the five one after the other, baas."

"You might have done so, Peter, but the sound of firing would have brought the whole town out at once. Besides, I should have been very sorry, for the landdrost was a very civil old fellow, and I should have been grieved if harm had come to him. I don't know that there is any fear of pursuit," he said, after they had run for more than an hour.

"No fear at all, baas. The Boers do not like riding about at night, especially when there is a storm coming on. Besides, they know very well that they have no chance of catching you in the dark. To-morrow morning they will send out in all directions. We must get away as far as we can."

In a quarter of an hour the storm burst upon them, the rain coming down in torrents, the wind blowing fiercely. They had now fallen into a jog-trot, and as Yorke had looked at his compass when the first drop fell, they were able to keep on without delay, for they could steer their course by the direction of the wind and driving rain. Half an hour, and the storm ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The Kaffir had been running a yard or two ahead of Yorke, for the latter could see nothing, while the former was able to make out any bush in their way. From the view he had obtained of the country when he came into the town the lad knew that there were no kopjes for a long way round it, and that the only danger was of falling into a spruit.

When the sky cleared and the stars shone out there was no longer any fear of accident, and, sometimes walking and sometimes trotting, they held on their course until morning broke. They had travelled, they calculated, nearly thirty miles. The last four or five had been over comparatively broken ground, being a continuation of the hills through which they had passed on their way to Kimberley. They hid up on the side of a rocky kopje, and when it was light made out the road from Boshof to Jacobsdal about a mile to their right.

"There is a little town in the distance," Yorke said, looking south. "That must be Wesselton. I don't think that is more than eight miles or so from the river. What we have got to do is to get round that place, keep a bit to the right of the road till we are close to the river, and then strike due west. Of course the most dangerous point is where we cross the road from Jacobsdal to Kimberley. Once past that we are safe, except that they may have scouts out towards our camp, to give them notice of any move that might be made against Jacobsdal. They say that a strong force is there, who intend, of course, to try and cut the railway in our rear when Lord Methuen moves forward. Now, the best thing we can do is to take a few hours' sleep."

In a few minutes he was sound asleep. The Kaffir slept

lightly, and every half-hour or so lifted his head and looked out over the road towards Boshof. Yorke awoke about midday. Peter was at that moment looking out.

"Do you see anything on the road, Peter?" Yorke asked.

"No one now, baas. Three hours after you went to sleep two Boers rode past going fast. I expect they were sent from Boshof to say that you had got away. Three hours after that more than twenty men came the other way. When they got to the plain they separated, and rode about searching the country as they went."

"Looking for us, no doubt," Yorke said. "Well, they won't find us, but it shows the alarm has spread. We shall have to be very careful now, Peter. Where is that food you bought at Boshof? I did not feel hungry last night, but my appetite has come back again this morning. If we go to that boulder fifty yards to the right we shall be in the shade."

"Better stay where we are, baas. The Boers are accustomed to hunt, and have got very good eyes, almost as good as ours. They might see us."

"But you said that there were none of them along the road now."

"That is so, baas, but there may be some of them on the hills hiding among the rocks. They would feel sure that we should come this way, and no doubt while some went out on the plain, some climbed up there in hopes of seeing us move."

"Quite right, Peter! it is no use throwing away a chance. We will stop where we are and put up with the sun."

"We have no meat, baas; I knew very well there would be no chance of cooking it. I have got a bag of biscuit and a bottle of whisky."

"Have you got your water-bottle?"

"Not left him behind, baas."

"Well, then, I will have some water, and when I have drunk half of it you can pour a little whisky in the rest for yourself."

"Whisky bad thing, baas, but very nice."

"It may be nice in small quantities for those who like it.

I don't like it. I never touch it if I can help it. It is the ruin of half your people, and you know it is against the law to give it to you."

"Against the law, baas, but we can always find plenty of men ready to sell it for good money."

"They are bad men, Peter. The harm they do is very great. That is why so many of your people are in rags, though they can earn pay when they are willing to work. They will only labour for three or four days, and then spend pretty well all they have earned on spirits, and be drunk the next three."

"That is true, baas. Peter do that very often. Big fool, Peter! Often tells himself so when he gets sober. But when he gets money he smells spirit, then he makes fool of himself again."

"Well, you had better make up your mind to give it up altogether, Peter. You are getting good pay now, and ought to have a lot of money saved by the end of the war—enough to go back to your own people and build a kraal, and buy cattle, and exchange some of them for a wife."

"That true, baas. Peter will try not to be big fool again."

"Well, then, you had better begin to try at once, and drink your water without mixing whisky with it."

Peter's face fell, and he heaved a long sigh.

"Now, just suppose, Peter, that at Boshof you had opened that bottle of whisky. I have no doubt that if you had begun it you would have drunk almost all of it, and by the time you got sober you would have found me a long way towards Pretoria."

"That is just what I said to myself," Peter said with a laugh. "I take that bottle out of my pocket four or five times and look at him. But each time I took it out I said to myself, 'Peter, if you take out that cork you know what it will be. You will get drunk, and the Boers will carry your baas away'."

"Well, Peter, you fought the battle and mastered yourself,

and there is no reason why you should not do it again. It is better to be a free man than a slave."

"How slave, master?" Peter asked, puzzled.

"Every man is a slave who allows himself to be mastered by drink. It is of no use to say, 'I will only have a drop.' It is ten times more difficult to stop then than it is at first. Now, Peter, you have done me a great service—a very great service, but I shall have done you quite as good a one if I can persuade you to give up drink altogether. Then, when I part from you, I shall be always able to think of you as doing well among your own people, instead of working in rags somewhere for a day's pay."

"Peter will try, master; he will try hard. Every time he smells gin, he will say to himself, 'Baas Yorke tell me, that ruin me if I touch it; and him say true, I will not touch it.'"

"That is right, Peter."

"Shall I smash the bottle now, baas?"

"Smash it when we get into camp. It is good for medicine, but very bad as drink. We may have to sleep near the river, and perhaps in wet clothes. Besides, it is better for you to carry it with you without touching it. You see that you have begun to get the better of it. I shall not say no to you if you ask me for some, but it will please me very much if you don't. Now, let us eat our biscuit."

When they had finished their simple meal, Yorke said: "I have had my sleep out, and it is evident that you cannot have slept much, therefore you may as well get a good sleep before we start. I will keep watch."

Late in the afternoon, Yorke saw the Boers straggling back. They had no doubt come to the conclusion that he and those with him were not hiding out on the plain.

"They will probably place extra men on the watch during the night," thought Yorke, "to make sure that we do not pass through Wesselton. We had better keep to the left of that place, because they will think it more likely that we should turn off to the right, as that would be our natural course in

making for the Modder. However, I cannot think that they will take any great trouble to look out for us, except on the road through these hills, for they cannot be sure that from Boshof we did not work round the other side of Kimberley, and try to return to the town from the west."

CHAPTER XI

MAGERSFONTEIN

AS soon as it was quite dark, Yorke and his companion were again on their way. It was toilsome work. They kept, as well as they could judge, a mile from the road, but it was a very rough piece of country. There were steep hills to climb and descend, tracts of boulder and rock to be crossed, and had it not been for the keen-eyed native, Yorke would have found it impossible to make his way. Fortunately the night was starlit, and this enabled them to keep their direction without having recourse to the dangerous expedient of striking a match. Presently the country became less rough and hilly.

"I think we have passed the range, Peter, and Wesselton cannot be very far off. Keep a sharp eye on the look-out for lights. Directly we see them, we shall know exactly what our position is. We have taken a very long time to cross the hills, and I want to sight the river before daylight. We are sure to find bushes or willows growing by the bank where we can hide."

Half an hour's walking, and Peter said in a low voice, "There are lights, baas," pointing somewhat to the left of the track they were taking.

For a time Yorke could not discern anything. Then a light shone out and disappeared almost instantly. "That is somebody carrying a candle or lamp across a room," he said. "I am much obliged to him, whoever it is. The road cannot be

far to the right, so bear more the other way. If there are any Boers about they would probably feel sure that we should strike off to the right."

Making a detour, they presently left the town behind them, and kept on due south. They had no fear whatever of anyone being on watch beyond Wesselton, and therefore stepped out boldly over the slightly undulating ground. Once or twice Yorke struck a match and looked at his compass, to be sure that they were keeping their course.

"I think we are near the river now, baas," Peter said at last.

"What makes you think that, Peter?"

"I smell the water."

"Do you, Peter? I did not know that it had any smell."

"Yes, baas. Oxen and deer and sheep all can smell it. Oxen always quicken their pace when they get near a pool."

"That would seem to show that you are right, but still I don't think there can be any smell; but there may be more damp in the air near water, and their senses in that way are more delicate than that of a white man. As you say you think we are near water I have no doubt you are right. Anyhow, I hope you are, for I have knocked the skin off my shins in half a dozen places among these rocks, and I have pretty nearly twisted my ankle as often, so I shall be glad enough to lie down. I certainly had several hours' sleep yesterday, but that did not make up for the loss of sleep the night before; besides, my feet are getting very tender. I have not walked, in all the months I have been out here, as much as during these two nights."

"Baas walks very well. No Dutchman ever walked half as far as you do."

"Perhaps not, Peter; they never use their legs. A Boer would get on a horse if he only wanted to go fifty yards to fetch anything. I used to be a good walker, but on the farm I got to be almost as lazy as the Dutchmen."

A quarter of an hour later a line of bushes rose in front of them.

"That looks as if the river were near."

"Just on other side of the bushes, baas."

So it turned out, and after climbing down to it, taking a long drink, for they had emptied their water-bottles before starting, they took a mouthful of food and lay down among the bushes.

"There is not the least occasion to keep watch," Yorke said. "It will be morning soon, and if either of us wake, we can peep out from the edge of the bushes and see if there are any Dutchmen in sight. If there are not, we can sleep on as long as we like."

Yorke did not wake till the sun was almost overhead. The native was crouching down near the bushes.

"Well, Peter, do you see anything?" he asked.

"I have seen Boers at that house there going in and out. They just rode in, waited half an hour, and rode away again. They did not look about at all; just paying a visit."

"We did not see the house last night, though we must have passed very close to it."

"We did not look for houses, baas, we looked for river."

"But as there are horses and cattle grazing about, I wonder we did not startle some of them. They must have been farther away from the house. They would have been sure to move if we had passed near them."

"Some came near here this morning, baas. Grass longer here. When river high, spread over country near."

"Well, as long as they don't enter the bushes, it does not matter, Peter. If they did, and came upon us, they would be startled and gallop away, and if any Boer happened to be looking from that house, he might saunter down here to see what caused their fright."

The day passed quietly, and as soon as it was dark they were in motion again.

"Our course is a very little to the south of west," Yorke said. "Now we are quite safe till we approach the road from Kimberley to Jacobsdal. Once past that, it is only

about ten miles to the railway, and by following the latter we shall reach the camp. But we can't go in till morning, for we have not got the countersign, and so should run the risk of being shot by one of our tramp pickets."

Four hours' tramp took them to the road. They could hear, as they approached it, a murmur of voices, and moved away to the right and walked for some distance before attempting to cross it.

"The Boers evidently have parties thrown out to give notice of any force approaching from our camp," Yorke said in low tones. "We shall have to be very careful, for there is no saying where they are posted, and they may extend almost up to the railway."

"Yes, we must take care, baas. If only two or three, we shoot them; if more of them, they shoot us. I go first, you come a little after me, baas. If there are Boers, they are sure to be talking, keeping themselves awake; if not talk, sure to be asleep, then we pass them safe."

"Yes, if you don't happen to tread on them."

"No fear of that, baas. I can see little shrub twenty yards away. I see body of big Boer farther than that."

Trusting implicitly to the sight and hearing of the Kaffir, Yorke followed some ten paces behind him, having his rifle now in his hand ready for use. They had gone a quarter of a mile, when suddenly on their left there was a movement, and a voice said, "Wake up, Philip! there is something moving."

"It is only a deer or a hare," the other said sleepily.

"No, it isn't," the man replied angrily. "If it had been a wild animal it would have dashed away when I spoke; instead of that, the noise stopped. It was footsteps, I could almost swear; most likely one of the rascally Kaffirs going to the Rooinek camp with news. We will soon see. Come along this way; that is where the sound came from."

Yorke had crouched down as soon as he stopped, and saw that the native had done the same. In a minute he saw the outlines of two dark figures.

"I can see you!" the Boer who had first spoken shouted. "Who are you, and where are you going? Answer, or I put a bullet through your head."

Yorke did not believe that he was seen, but he knew that if the Boers advanced two paces farther they would make him out, and the first intimation he would have that they did so would be given by a rifle bullet. It was a question of life or death, and accordingly he took a steady aim and fired. The man he aimed at fell without a cry. As he pulled the trigger Yorke threw himself flat upon the ground, and it was as well that he did so, for the other Boer fired where he had seen the flash of his rifle. Almost at the same moment another rifle was discharged, and the Boer dropped his gun, and with an oath ran off at full speed. Peter was by Yorke's side before the latter could get on to his feet.

"Are you wounded, baas?"

"No; by the sound the shot went through my water-bottle. Two inches lower and I should have had it in the hip."

"I was aiming at the same man as you," the native said, "till you fired and I saw him fall, and before I could change my aim the other man had fired. I was just too late to stop him."

"It was a good thing that you hit him, Peter, for if you had not done so he would have fired again. No doubt his magazine was full, and the next shot might have done its business. I had not time to think when I threw myself down; if I had done so I should have dropped with my head towards him, and then I could have fired again, but I went down sideways, and so for the moment could not use my rifle. You hit the other man in the arm, I think, for his rifle dropped, he did not throw it down. Now, we must run our hardest, Peter. Do you hear them shouting? We may as well go straight on as any other way. By the row they are making they seem to be all over the place, so it is no use trying to avoid them."

Keeping close together now, they ran at the top of their

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"IN A MINUTE HE SAW THE OUTLINES OF TWO DARK FIGURES"

speed, changing their course occasionally when they heard voices ahead of them. The noise was all in their favour, for it completely drowned the slight sound made by their footsteps, and served as a warning to them of the position of the various outposts. They maintained their pace for nearly a mile. The sounds were all behind them now, so they broke into a walk, which they maintained until they came upon the line of railway.

"We will walk along on the other side of this. Keep your ears open, Peter, and listen for the slightest movement. I don't know how far our outposts are thrown out, and I want to stop before we get near them."

They had walked some three miles, when Peter said:

"Stop, baas. I heard a noise; I think a soldier stamping his feet to warm himself."

"All right, Peter! I am sure we cannot be very far off now, so we will wait till morning. We can sleep till broad daylight."

Three hours later the native touched Yorke.

"Sun is just up. Shall we go on now?"

"Certainly. We will sling our rifles again. If we have them in our hands the sentry might think it wiser to fire at once, without asking questions. However, now that he can see my uniform, I have little fear of that, but it is as well to be on the safe side."

As they approached they could see that the sentry called to a comrade close by, for another at once joined him. When they came within a hundred yards the sentry challenged.

"An officer with despatches from Kimberley," Yorke replied.

"You can come on for a bit," the soldier said, "but I shall not let you pass farther until an officer comes."

"I have a permit from General Colvile to enter and pass the lines."

"Then you can come on, but don't touch those guns of yours till I have seen your permit."

The sentry was justified in being doubtful, for many of

the Boers had adopted khaki-coloured clothes, and at a very short distance Yorke might well have been mistaken for one of these.

"That is all right, sir," the soldier said, when he had read the permit. "We are obliged to be careful, you know; and if you had come before it got light I could not have let you pass without the countersign."

"You were quite right to stop me," Yorke said. "It is because I knew that I could not get in without the countersign that I have been sleeping for the last three or four hours a quarter of a mile away. Did you hear any firing in the night?"

"I did not, sir; but the man I relieved told me that he had heard three shots over to the right, and we were charged to be extra vigilant."

"You need not be so any longer. One shot was fired at me as I came through some Boer outposts a couple of miles this side of the road from Jacobsdal. The others are the two shots we fired. There are a good many of the Boers about, but we got through safely."

"Is Kimberley all right, sir? You said you came from there."

"Yes, they can hold out for some time."

"They won't have to hold out long, sir. We shall be there before another week is over, I hope."

"I hope so too," Yorke agreed, and then he and Peter walked on.

He followed the line of railway. There were two or three strong posts upon it, but, seeing that he had been allowed to pass by the most advanced sentries, no questions were asked him. Nearing the river, he turned off and proceeded at once to head-quarters. On arriving there he was told that General Colvile was dressing, and would be out in a few minutes.

"Shall I take your name in, sir?" the orderly asked.

"No, I will wait till the general is ready."

In ten minutes General Colvile came out with General Pole-Carew, and on seeing Yorke, said heartily:

"So you are back, Mr. Harberton. We got our search-lights to work last night for the first time, and got into communication with Kimberley. They have been flashing signals for some days, but we have not been able to answer them until now. Last night we asked, 'Has messenger arrived?', and we got an answer, 'Yes, and left two days ago'."

"Then I am afraid that my report will be of little use to you, sir."

"On the contrary, we are most anxious to hear it. There are fellows in their ranks who have served with us, and one or more of these can doubtless read our signals. We have only asked them if they could hold out until we arrive, and they said 'yes'. We abstained from asking any further questions, for from prisoners we hear that the Boers feel sure that Kimberley cannot hold out much longer. Now, in the first place, what is your report?"

"This is all I have brought, sir. Colonel Kekewich was afraid that I might be caught on my way out, consequently I only put down, as you see on this slip of paper, his estimate of the amount of stores. It will not take me five minutes to write out the names of the various articles to which the figures refer."

"And were you caught?"

"Yes, and this paper was examined; but they could make neither head nor tail of it, and threw it on the ground and I recovered it.

"Well, just complete that list, then, and I will take it in to Lord Methuen, who is, I am happy to say, going on well. But first, you can answer me generally, how long can they hold out?"

"I should think, sir, for three months. Some items may run short, but in general Colonel Kekewich was of opinion that the stores available were considerably greater than those

indicated by the figures, as most of the residents had laid in private stores before the town was altogether cut off."

"That is most satisfactory. We may be sure that they won't have to wait so long as that. If you will write out the list at once I will take it in to Lord Methuen, and after that you can give me an account of how you got in, and how you got away after once being caught by the Boers."

Yorke wrote out the list.

"Very good indeed, much better than I had expected. I see you have put a query behind the number of shell. What does that mean? There can be no private store of shell."

"No, sir; but the De Beers people have set to to manufacture them, and have begun to turn them out rapidly. They have already been tried, and the gunners can make as good practice as with our own."

"Good indeed! I see that there is a mark after the number of the guns."

"Yes, sir; the De Beers people have begun making a long gun. They heard that the Boers are bringing up a hundred-pounder, and they hope that the one they are making will have a longer range than that piece, although I believe it is not to carry so heavy a shot."

The two officers left the room with the list; General Colvile returned in a few minutes. "Lord Methuen will see you," he said. "He would like to question you himself."

Yorke followed him into another room. Lord Methuen was lying on a couch.

"I congratulate you upon your safe return, Mr. Harberton," he said. "It has been a most hazardous service, but the news you have obtained has been invaluable. We dared not question Kimberley about their store of provisions, for if their answers were understood by the Boers they would see that their chance of reducing the place by hunger was so slight that they might decide to abandon the siege and to march away into the Colony, which is the thing of all others we wish to prevent."

"Colonel Kekewich saw that, sir," Yorke said; "and that is why he would not give me any written details."

Lord Methuen asked many particulars as to the defences of Kimberley, the effect of the Boer bombardment, and the temper of the population. "Did you see Mr. Rhodes?"

"Yes, sir."

"How does he get on with the commandant?"

"I think, sir, from what I heard, that there is some friction between him and the military authorities, but nothing serious at all. All the resources of the mines have been placed by him in the hands of the authorities. He is employing a large number of Kaffirs in making roads, and these he pays and feeds, which is a great relief to the authorities; for they have twice tried to send the Kaffirs out of the town, but both times the Boers have compelled them to return, no doubt because they think that the more mouths there are to feed, the sooner the provisions will be exhausted."

"And now, Mr. Harberton, tell us how you managed to get into the town and to return here."

Yorke related his adventures.

"You have been fortunate indeed," the general said, "and have had three very narrow escapes—in the first place, at that hut which you defended so stoutly; in the next place, when you were first taken prisoner; and lastly, in getting through the Boer lines this side of Jacobsdal, to say nothing of your escape at Boshof. Your Kaffir must be a stout fellow."

"He is, sir. Without his assistance I should by this time be a long way on my road to Pretoria."

"Well, your services have been most valuable, and I shall have great pleasure in recommending you for a commission if you would like to take one."

"I thank you very much, sir. I should feel it a great honour. And even if I resigned at the end of the war, it would be all my life a gratification to have received the Queen's commission."

"I suppose you would prefer the cavalry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, I will recommend that you be gazetted to the 9th Lancers. The colonel will be glad to have you; what with casualties and illness he is short of subalterns. You have been very favourably reported before for your expedition from De Aar across the Orange River, and there can be no doubt that my recommendation will be acceded to at once."

"May I ask what I am to do with the twenty Kaffir scouts who have been working under me?"

"You had better hand them over to Major Rimington. He will know how to employ them."

"Will you see, general, that Mr. Harberton is put in orders as provisionally appointed second lieutenant in the 9th Lancers, but detailed for special duty as extra aide-de-camp to General Pole-Carew?"

"Thank you," that officer said. "I shall be very glad to have him, for I am one short already. Mr. Lucas is down with fever of some sort, and the doctor says that if he does not get better he must send him off to the base hospital. I think Mr. Harberton would be much more useful with me than he could be with his regiment. I will ride over with him to the Lancer camp and introduce him to the colonel."

"Thank you! that would be best. When telegraphing home to-day, will you say that Mr. Harberton, second lieutenant in the Cape Town Riflemen, has been provisionally appointed second lieutenant 9th Lancers, for very distinguished services in carrying despatches into and out of Kimberley and upon other occasions? That will settle the matter at once, and we shall have an answer in two or three days."

"Have you a horse, Mr. Harberton?" General Pole-Carew asked as they left the house.

"Yes, a very good one; but it is at Rimington's camp."

The general turned to the orderly who was holding his horse and his own. "Hand your horse to this gentleman; he will return it to you in half an hour. Wait here till he does so."

The Lancers were encamped a mile away to the north. Some of the tents had now come up. From one of these the colonel came out, and the sentry at the door told him that the general was approaching.

"Good-morning, colonel!" the latter said as he dismounted. "I have come to introduce to you Lieutenant Harberton. Lord Methuen has telegraphed home recommending him for a commission in your regiment. The provisional appointment will be in orders this morning. He has won the commission by carrying a despatch into Kimberley and returning with a message from Kekewich at, I need not say, immense risk. He has performed other meritorious services. He has been hitherto a lieutenant in the Cape Town Rifles, and has been attached to Rimington's corps. I am afraid, however, that at present you will derive no benefit from his services, as I have commandeered him as one of my aides in place of Lucas, who is ill. He speaks Taal like a native."

"I should have been very glad to have him, sir, for I am short of officers. But no doubt, speaking Dutch as he does, he will be still more useful to you."

"Yes, none of my staff speak the language well. I should think that it would be a good thing for you to ask Rimington to let you have one or two of his men. You might find them of great advantage with scouting parties, when we once move again. If you like, I will ask him myself; I am going to his camp now."

"Thank you! It would certainly be of great use, and of course such a request coming from you would be complied with at once."

"I will leave you here, Mr. Harberton. I shall not want you to-day, and you may as well get acquainted with the officers of your regiment. Lucas may rejoin again soon, and then you may join them. At any rate, when you ride over here with a message it would be more pleasant for you to be acquainted with them.

"I shall feel obliged, colonel, if you will send one of your

men to head-quarters to hand over the horse Mr. Harberton is riding to the trooper he will find waiting there. His own horse is at Rimington's camp; it is only a quarter of a mile away. No doubt he will be going over there presently, as he has been attached to them for some little time.

"You will come in this evening, Mr. Harberton, and take up your quarters with my staff. I believe there is still an empty room; if not, they will find one for you close by."

"We are just going to sit down to breakfast, Mr. Harberton," the colonel said. "It will be a good opportunity for introducing you to the officers, and we shall all be glad to hear how you got into Kimberley and what you found there."

Five minutes later Yorke was sitting down to breakfast at a long table formed of packing-cases and a rough board. He had been introduced to the officers, and at the colonel's request had taken his seat next to him. After the meal was over he gave an account of his adventures in entering and leaving Kimberley.

"Well managed indeed!" the colonel said. "That Kaffir of yours must be a capital fellow."

"He is, sir, and I should be very sorry to part with him; I have a Dutch trooper with me as my servant, but I can take him in to look after my horse."

"I will take him, if you don't want him, and he will come," one of the captains said. "I have a boy I took on at Orange River, but he is of no use at all. Of course you can have him again if you join us."

"Thank you! but I would not part with him on any account, after what he has done for me; I shall certainly keep him with me as long as I remain out here, and shall see that he is completely settled before I go home. Besides, I should need him again if I ever am sent on another expedition."

After breakfast the Lancers went out to make a reconnaissance towards Magersfontein, and Yorke walked over to Rimington's camp. Hans ran out to meet him.

"So you have returned, Master Yorke! I have not slept for the last two nights, I have been so anxious about you."

"Yes, I got through all right, Hans. I was held prisoner for twenty-four hours, but Long Peter got me out. I will tell you all about it later."

"You are going to stay here now, I hope?"

"No. General Pole-Carew has put me on his staff. You are to come with me as an orderly."

"I am glad," Hans said. "I don't care what I do so long as I am with you."

"You have been getting on all right, I trust, while I was away. I hope the Kaffirs have behaved well?"

"Yes; they have been out twice in the direction of Jacobsdal, but they could not get near the place. The Boer outposts are a long way out."

"Yes, they nearly shot me last night. We ran right into the middle of them."

They were by this time close to the camp, and some of the officers joined Yorke.

"Have you been into Kimberley?" they asked at once.

"Yes. I met with no difficulty until I was nearly there, but managed to get in after a skirmish. I had worse luck getting out, for I was caught. However, my Kaffir came to the rescue, and I got back without much trouble."

"And how are they getting on there?"

"They can hold out for a long time, and are, I think, quite strong enough to beat off any attack that can be made upon them. I think the Boers know it too, for they have made no serious assault, though they keep on firing."

"I suppose you are coming back to us now?"

"No, Lord Methuen has recommended me for a commission in the Lancers, and General Pole-Carew has put me on to his staff, as one of his aides has fever."

The others congratulated him warmly. "I thought you would get a commission," one of them said, "when I heard that you had undertaken to get through to Kimberley. I am

sure you deserve it, for it must have been beastly dangerous work."

Yorke remained in the camp an hour, and had to tell his story over again. He arranged with the colonel that the Kaffir scouts should remain with him until he had spoken to the head of the Intelligence Department, who might wish to employ them himself, and then he and Hans mounted and rode into the camp on the Modder. Long Peter was sitting quietly where Yorke had left him. The latter told him of the changes that had taken place.

"Of course I shall take you with me, Peter, and the horses will be in your special charge. Hans will look after other matters. After what we have gone through together, I shall always keep you with me as long as I remain out here, unless, of course, you yourself wish to leave me."

"I shall never want to do that, baas. You have treated us all well, as if we had been your children, and now we have fought the Boers together, I hope always to be with you. I have got some money, and I will buy a pony, so as to be able always to keep up with you. I can buy one for a pound after the next battle."

"Do not do so till I tell you, Peter. I know that Kaffir boys always do ride when they go with their masters, but I do not know whether it would be the proper thing for officers on the staff. At any rate, do nothing till I tell you. When it is necessary you should have a horse, I will buy one for you."

Having arranged this matter, Yorke remained with his regiment until the evening. There was nothing for him to change in his uniform, except to fasten metal badges showing the number and name of the regiment to his shoulder-strap. He could not obtain the red tabs which were the badge of the staff for the collar of his jacket. After dinner he rode back to head-quarters, where he found that a room had been got ready for him.

Troops were now arriving. The 12th Lancers had come up, and a battery of Horse Artillery. The Highland Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Black Watch, 1st Gordons, 2nd Seaforths,

and the 1st Highland Light Infantry, next day came into camp, and the artillery were further reinforced by four howitzers. The line of communications had been strengthened by the Canadians, Australians, and several line regiments being posted along the railway from De Aar to Belmont.

On the 9th the Horse Artillery, 9th Lancers, and the heavy naval guns moved forward and opened fire on the stony hills that constituted the Boer positions. All day the guns thundered, searching out every rock behind which it was thought the Boers might be lurking. The naval guns distributed their heavy shell broadcast, the great clouds of yellow smoke showing where the lyddite charges had burst. But the Boers made no reply. Not a gun spoke out in return, not a Boer was visible on the face of the hills—nothing showed where their artillery was, or where their trenches stretched. All in the camp were filled with excitement. It was certain that the time was at hand when they would meet the foe in strength face to face, and, formidable as was the position, no one doubted the result. At the same time the silence of the enemy, the uncertainty as to their strength and position, could not but inspire a certain feeling of uneasiness.

On the afternoon of the 10th the Black Watch, Seaforths, Argyle and Sutherlands, and Highland Light Infantry moved out. The Gordons had only come in that morning, and remained in camp. The 9th Lancers, mounted infantry, and all the artillery accompanied the force. When within three miles of the enemy's position the force halted. It was raining heavily, but there was nothing for it but to lie down upon the wet ground, with one blanket for every two men. At one o'clock in the morning they were on their feet again.

The position held by the Boers was of great strength. The centre, Scholtz Kop, was very steep and lofty; it was close to the line of railway, and Spytfontein station lay at its foot. So strong did it appear, and furnished, as it doubtless was, with artillery, it could only have been carried with immense loss. Some distance to the left were the Magersfontein kopjes,

less forbidding and rough than those of Spytfontein, and from these to the river stretched a low hill, covered with bush from eight to ten feet high. Magersfontein once taken would render this hill untenable, and would enable Scholtz Kop to be taken in flank or rear. It was therefore against this point that the attack by the Highland Brigade, under General Wauchope, was to be made.

It was pitch dark when the column started—so dark that it was considered impossible for the men to keep touch with each other marching in line, and accordingly they moved in mass of quarter columns. Strangely enough, not a single scout was thrown out ahead, probably because the general thought that it would be impossible to follow them in the dark, and moreover, that, should they come upon the Boers suddenly and fire be opened, the attack by surprise would be altogether spoiled, and the Boers be fully prepared before the main body could arrive. It is certain, however, that had the usual precautions been adopted the catastrophe that followed would have been avoided. Slowly feeling their way along, the great column, four thousand strong, moved on silently. The men were drenched to the skin, hungry, in doubt as to the nature of the position they had to attack, and oppressed by the darkness and strangeness of the situation.

They were still some distance from the hill when orders were given for the column to open out into line; but instead of being, as their commander believed, a good half-mile from the enemy's lines, they were within two hundred yards of them, for the Boers had, with great craft and ability, dug a great trench along the whole face of their position a quarter of a mile out on the plain. No suspicion had been entertained in our camp of the existence of this defence, and the Highlanders had marched unsuspectingly into the trap. As they were in the act of opening out, with the Black Watch in the centre, the Seaforths to the left, the Argyle and Sutherlands to the right, and the Highland Light Infantry in reserve, a light was flashed on their left by one of the Boers, who had

probably kept near the column as it advanced. In an instant a blaze of fire ran along the whole front, and a storm of bullets smote the column. It told most heavily upon the Black Watch. For half a minute the roar of musketry was unceasing, then for a moment it ceased. The Boers had emptied the magazines of their rifles.

It was but a temporary pause, for in a few seconds the fire again burst out. The loss among the Black Watch had already been frightful. General Wauchope had fallen, together with a large number of the officers; and although at first the men had prepared to charge, it was impossible to withstand the fire, and they ran back, spreading confusion in the ranks of the Seaforths, who were still behind them. The latter, however, remained steady. They had naturally suffered less heavily than the corps in front of them, and they stood their ground, lying down and returning the fire of their hidden foes. The Black Watch halted and lay down behind them. As time went on, the troops managed gradually to extend, two companies of the Seaforths moving out to the right, while the Argyle and Sutherlands, and the Highland Light Infantry, crept farther still to the right, in hopes of being able to open a flanking fire on the enemy.

But these movements were not executed without heavy loss. Twice the Seaforths sprang to their feet and advanced by rushes at the trenches. Some even made their way to within a few yards of them. But it was light now. The officers were shot down and the men decimated, and each time the survivors sullenly fell back. For three hours they lay upon the ground near the spot where they had been attacked. No help came to them, for incomprehensibly this brigade had been sent forward alone, and without reserves, to attack the whole force of the Boers in an immensely strong position. Some of the artillery had, however, advanced with great boldness, and their fire to some extent relieved the pressure. The Boers had now pushed along the low bush-covered hill between Magersfontein and the river, and had

opened a flanking fire on the Highlanders. At seven o'clock Lord Airlie brought up the 12th Lancers, dismounted two squadrons, and, aided by a battery of horse artillery, who pressed forward to within two hundred yards of the fighting line, and took up their position on the right of the Highland Brigade, to some extent checked the fire from that quarter.

Two hours later the brigade of Guards came up. Two battalions of the Coldstreams occupied the ground next to the dismounted men. The Grenadiers prolonged the line until they were in touch with the Yorkshires, who were guarding the drift across the Modder River. The other half-battalion took up a post by the three batteries, which had stationed themselves in rear of the Highland Brigade. Still farther to the left was the naval gun near the railway, which was protected from an attack in that direction by the Northamptons, while a Howitzer battery further in advance joined it in maintaining a heavy cannonade. At mid-day the Gordons arrived to support the Highlanders, who all these hours were lying within two or three hundred yards of the Boer trenches unable to move, while their foes were unwilling to risk taking the offensive. They had several times threatened to do so, but the fire of the Horse Artillery guns had each time caused them to abandon their intention.

At two in the afternoon the Boer fire, which had somewhat slackened, again broke out fiercely to the left. It appeared that an attacking force was at hand, and the men of the Highland Brigade, parched with thirst, unnerved by the fearful ordeal they had gone through, burned and blistered by the sun, staggered back, losing heavily, and little by little retired until they reached the line of the guns, three-quarters of a mile in their rear. They straggled in in groups, regiments mixed up together. Here they halted, and the few officers who remained alive did their utmost to restore order and cohesion. Not until five o'clock in the afternoon was this accomplished, when, just as they were about to advance again, the Boer batteries, which had strangely enough been silent

all day, opened fire. A shell exploded a short distance away from the brigade, and at once they broke down again. The officers in vain endeavoured to restrain them; the men could not be rallied until they reached the field hospital camp.

For once nature had overcome the dauntless spirit of some of the finest soldiers in the world. For thirteen hours they had been under a tremendous fire; during that time they had been practically without orders. Their beloved general had fallen, together with many of the senior officers; but even if these had lived it would have been impossible to send orders from point to point, or to arrange for any general action, since the slightest movement of position was certain to attract a rain of bullets. They were, in fact, bewildered and dazed by the roar of musketry so terrible and unexpected, the heavy losses, the impossibility of movement, still more of getting at their foes. Their inability to do aught but suffer had broken them down. It speaks highly indeed for the discipline and courage of these soldiers that at Paardeberg they should have entirely recovered their morale, and have shown their old conspicuous bravery, unsurpassed by that of any other regiment.

The brigade of Guards maintained their position all night. They had covered the retreat of the Highlanders, and now prevented the Boers from taking the offensive, and held their post until they were next morning recalled to camp. They then drew off, suffering somewhat severely as they did so, under a heavy artillery fire.

The losses in the Highland Brigade were fifteen officers and one hundred and twenty-two men killed, thirty-one officers, four hundred and twenty-one men wounded, two officers and one hundred and ten men missing. The Boer loss was caused almost entirely by our artillery fire, as some of the guns had been able to sweep portions of their trenches. Their official account gave it as seventy killed and two hundred and three wounded, but an intercepted letter placed it very much higher, and reported their loss at from twelve hundred to fifteen hundred.

CHAPTER XII

A PRISONER

IT was a dreary time in camp during the two days when the operation of collecting and burying the dead was going on. The stillness which prevailed was in strong contrast with the activity and cheerfulness which reigned before the battle. Then the men had joked and laughed in anticipation of the success they confidently expected, now they moved about silently. Not only were they grieving over the heavy losses, and sympathizing deeply with the Highland regiments, which had suffered so terribly, but all felt that the attempt could not be renewed, and that they were doomed to a long period of inaction until large reinforcements could arrive.

General Gatacre had suffered a very heavy reverse at Stormberg on the day before Magersfontein was fought. He had made a long night march in hopes of surprising the Boers, but by the treachery or ignorance of his guides, and the fact that the Boers had been apprised of his intention by rebel sympathizers, he had himself fallen into an ambush. Everything had, indeed, from the first, gone wrong. The intention of the general had been allowed to leak out two days previously, and thus the large portion of the population who were disloyal had ample time to warn the Boers at Stormberg. The trucks in which the troops were to be conveyed as far as Molteno were not assembled at the time named, and two hours were therefore lost. A portion of the column missed their way in the dark, and were miles distant from the main force when the fight began. Lastly, instead of the troops being allowed perfect rest during the day before starting on an expedition which demanded all their strength and vigour, they had been up early, and spent hours under arms, going through the fatigue of a field-day; and so worn-out were they

when the time for action arrived, that many fell asleep while the battle was raging.

Thus, as the Boers were posted in an inaccessible position, the action was a massacre rather than a fight, and had it not been for the splendid bravery of the artillerymen, the whole force would have been killed or forced to surrender. The loss in killed and wounded was not great, the casualties being under one hundred, but six hundred men of the Irish Rifles and the Northumberlands were taken prisoners, and two guns lost. The large number of captives was due to two causes. First, in their attempt to get at the enemy, some of the troops had climbed the rock to a point where farther advance was impossible, and retreat, under the tremendous fire maintained upon them, meant certain death. Secondly, many were overpowered by fatigue and want of sleep, staggered out of the ranks during the retreat, and, dropping on the ground, slept until they woke to find themselves prisoners.

There was yet further bad news to come, for, four days after Magersfontein, Buller was defeated in his attempt to force the Boer lines, guns were lost, and there was a heavy death-roll. It was no consolation to the men who had fought at Magersfontein to know that they were not alone in misfortune, and that similar reverses had been encountered in Natal and Cape Colony.

The question that each asked the other was, What would they say in England? Would the same craven policy that had prevailed after Majuba be adopted, and another surrender be made to the Boers? or would the nation show the energy that had in old times been evinced when danger was greatest, and rise to the occasion? Even in that case, many weeks must elapse before sufficient reinforcements could arrive from England to enable them to take the offensive again; for that another advance against the Boer position was impossible even the most sanguine had to admit.

The whole force were now gathered on the Modder, and they had no fear that the Boers would be able to drive them

from it. But this was but a poor consolation. All were burning to retrieve the last defeat, and it was gall and wormwood to know that they would be forced to remain inactive. In the camp of the Scottish regiments the feeling was bitter in the extreme. Now that the long agony of the conflict, which had broken down the nerve of the strongest, was over, they felt that they had to some extent tarnished the reputation of regiments which had hitherto been without a blemish, and the blame was thrown by them, not on the general whom they so loved, but upon Lord Methuen. The imputation was an unfounded one. The task before Lord Methuen was one of enormous difficulty. The point he had selected for attack was the best that could have been chosen. The only fault committed by him was, that he did not risk the lives of a few mounted men, by sending small parties out to reconnoitre the veldt to the foot of the kopjes, in order to discover the exact position of the Boer trenches.

His instructions had been clear. The force was to advance to within attacking position of the kopjes, and there to halt until daybreak. The arrangements for the advance of the brigade were, as always, left to the discretion of the brigadier. It was for him to send the advance guards to feel the way, and for him to order the heavy column to deploy into open order. These precautions were not taken by General Wauchope. A trap had been set, and he fell into that trap without taking any of the usual precautions, and he atoned for the mistake with his life. To the gallant regiments themselves no blame can be attributable for their failure. It is true that they broke down under the strain, but it may be doubted whether any soldiers in the world could have withstood it better. The surprise had been complete, and nearly five hundred men had fallen in a few minutes under that terrible fire, to which they could make no effective reply. They had maintained themselves all day under a blazing sun, with the ground round them torn up by bullets, and the slightest movement entailing certain death. Their consequent depression of spirits was

increased by the exhaustion due to want of food and water. A great proportion of their officers had fallen, and there was no one to give them orders. It was not wonderful, then, that their nerves failed them, and that, when at the end of that awful day they gathered, the bursting of a shell near should have scattered like sheep soldiers who, in other circumstances, would have marched up to a cannon's mouth without flinching. It must be remembered, too, that the conduct of the Gordons, and the splendid bravery they showed, went far in itself to retrieve the high reputation of the Highland regiments.

Three days after Magersfontein, General Pole-Carew said to Yorke: "An officer with a patrol is going down the line to Graspan to see that the rails are clear for the train of wounded that will start later. I shall be obliged if you will go with them, and carry a despatch from Lord Methuen, giving particulars of the wounded who will come in by the train, and ordering medical comforts and fatigue parties to be in readiness; also a second despatch, with orders to the officer commanding there. After the attack they made on Belmont a few days ago, it is highly necessary to take every precaution against an attack at Graspan by the Boers from Jacobsdal. They are sure to be more active after their success here."

"Very well, sir. When does the party start?"

"In half an hour's time. The despatches will be ready for you in ten minutes. When you have received the reply, you need not wait for the party to return, but ride straight back."

"Very good, sir; I will return here in a quarter of an hour."

"Hans, I want my horse saddled at once," Yorke said, as he joined his follower.

"Yes, Master Yorke. Am I to saddle my own too?"

"No. I am only riding to Graspan with a despatch, and am joining a party who are going there to see that the line is in good order. I shall be back to dinner."

In a quarter of an hour Yorke, having received his despatches, rode off to the camp of the Lancers. The party was already prepared for a start. It consisted of an officer and twelve men. The former was already known to Yorke.

"I heard that you were going with us, Harberton," he said, as Yorke rode up. "I shall be glad of your company. It is dull work riding alone, especially when you have nothing to do but see that the rails have not been torn up in the night."

"I don't suppose there is much fear of that," Yorke replied, "for if the Boers had been there, they would have been sure to cut the telegraph wire, and they have not done so. I know that messages have been exchanged this morning."

"If they can communicate," the officer said, "I don't see why you should have been sent with a despatch."

"The lines and wires are so fully occupied by messages to De Aar and to the Cape, and backwards and forwards between the general and the home authorities, that they cannot be spared for details to Graspan; and personally, I would much rather be cantering over there and back than be idle in camp."

"That is just my feeling," the other said. "I am afraid that it will be a long time before we have much to do here. However, there is one comfort, we shall have a chance to get supplies from the base. They would not let us telegraph, so we have sent a man down to Cape Town with a long list of orders. Whether or not we shall get them through, I don't know. Now, if you are ready, I will start."

The order was given, and the party rode off at a trot.

"One feels quite glad to get out of camp," the officer said. "Everyone is so completely in the dumps that it is downright misery to remain there. However, I don't expect it will last very long. We shall cheer up a bit if we hear that the people at home are not disheartened, and are going to send out a big lot of troops and carry the thing through, whatever it costs."

"I have no doubt they will," Yorke said. "It is not often we back down because we have had a heavy blow. Look how we buckled to at the time of the Mutiny."

"I sincerely hope so," the officer said; "but one can never feel sure, after the way we surrendered to the Boers before. It makes one sick to think of it even now. Still, three such blows as they have had in the course of a week are pretty hard to bear. However, let us hope that the whole country will harden their hearts and determine that the thing must be carried through."

So talking, they rode along until they came to a spot where the foot of one of the hills extended almost up to the line. Then there was a sudden shout. Some fifty Boers rose from behind the rocks, and a heavy volley was poured into the little party. The officer in command and seven of the troopers fell. Yorke's horse went down suddenly, shot through the head, and the other five troopers galloped on at full speed, the Boers keeping up an incessant fire upon them. Three fell, and but two rode on to Graspan. Yorke's leg was pinned under his fallen horse, and he made no effort to rise, for he knew that any motion would draw a dozen rifle-shots on him. When the firing had ceased the Boers came down.

"I surrender," Yorke said, as the first came up to him.

"Are you wounded?"

"No, except that my leg feels crushed under my horse. I would rather have been wounded myself than have lost him."

"You will have no occasion for him at present," the Boer said; and, calling two or three others to him, they raised the horse sufficiently to be able to drag Yorke out.

"The others are all dead," one of the Boers said. "Some of them got half a dozen bullets through them. This is an officer, isn't it?"

"Yes," Yorke replied, "I am a subaltern in the 9th Lancers, you can see the number on my shoulder-strap; and I carry a field-glass and revolver as well as a rifle."

"What is your name?"

"Yorke Harberton."

"Can you walk?"

"I don't think I can at present," Yorke said, "but I may be able to do so presently."

"That won't do," the man said. "We shall be having some of the cavalry from Graspan on us, as the two men who have got away will ride there with the news. However, we have got spare ponies behind the hill here. Two of you take this youngster, and carry him. I suppose you were not in command here?" he went on, as two men lifted Yorke from the ground and carried him off.

"No, that officer was in command."

"I see he is older than you. I suppose he was taking some message to Graspan?"

"He did not tell me," Yorke answered truthfully, "and it was not my business to ask him; but of course he must have had some orders. More troops are coming along—three or four hundred, I believe."

"Then there is no time to lose. Hurry on, men! I will see if the officer has any despatches on him."

He rejoined the party just as they reached the ponies.

"Not a scrap of paper of any sort," he said. "He can only have had verbal orders. It won't do for us to carry out the business we came here for, for they might be upon us before we had time to pull up half a dozen rails, and were we to try it they might catch us before we had time to get away. At any rate, we have done a good morning's work—ten men and an officer; we have got a prisoner, two pairs of field-glasses, two revolvers, and ten carbines."

Three hours' riding took the party to Jacobsdal. Yorke's leg had hurt a good deal on starting, but the pain had to a great extent gone off before reaching the town, and now he found he could walk. He had managed, as he rode, to tear up the despatches he had received, and had, one by one, chewed up the pieces and swallowed them. They could, even if discovered, have done no harm now; but had they been found at first, the Boers would no doubt have torn up the line,

and might have caused an accident that would have been fatal to many of the wounded. Had he been asked the question, he must have produced them; but, regarding him only as a young subaltern, they had not thought for a moment that, going with a senior officer, he would be trusted with despatches. He was, however, glad when he got rid of the last fragment, and still more so when, on being placed in the guard-room, he was searched from head to foot. He was supplied with food and treated with some consideration by the Boers, who were in high spirits at the three great successes they had gained.

"Why don't your soldiers give it up?" one of them asked him. "They must see by this time that they are no good against us. We would allow them to go down to the coast and embark on board ship without molesting them."

"There is an old saying with us," Yorke replied, "that a British soldier never knows when he is beaten; and though certainly we have been unfortunate lately, I can assure you that the idea that we are beaten for good has not occurred to any of us. We are angry at our defeats, but in no way disheartened. We consider that the war has only just begun yet, and have no doubt that twice as many men as are in South Africa now, will be sent out as soon as the ships can be got ready for them."

"Poor fellows!" the Boer said. "We hear that they have to be made drunk to get them on board ship, and those that won't drink have to be ironed."

"I am afraid," Yorke said, "that you hear a great many lies, and you may be quite sure that that is one of them. I can tell you, the last news we had was that the Militia regiments, which are only raised for home service, and some even of the Volunteers, have sent in applications asking to be allowed to come out on service."

"Ah! they don't know what is before them, poor lads! Either death, or, if they escape that, imprisonment till the war is over and we allow them to go away. I do not say

that your soldiers are not brave. They astonished us at Belmont and Graspan. But those were mere skirmishes."

"But we crossed the Modder in your teeth."

"Yes," the Boer admitted reluctantly, "it looked like it; but we did not want to stop you altogether there, only to encourage you to march against our real position at Spytfontein. We knew you had no chance there, and intended to annihilate you."

"Yes, but you did not do it," Yorke said with a smile. "We suffered heavily from blundering up against your trenches, of whose existence we knew nothing; but there was no annihilation about it. It is the opinion of many that if we had pushed forward all along the line in the afternoon, we should have won the position; at any rate, your men were very careful not to make a counter attack."

"We are only waiting for Ladysmith and Kimberley to fall," the Boer said; "then we shall all advance into Cape Colony, break up the railways, and, joined by the whole of the Dutch people, sweep all before us to Cape Town."

"It is a good programme," Yorke agreed; "but neither Ladysmith nor Kimberley have fallen yet."

"They cannot hold out much longer," the man replied. "When the people of Kimberley learn that help has failed to come to them, they will not be fools enough to starve any longer. As for Ladysmith, it is as good as taken; the garrison cannot hold out many days longer. Then Joubert will advance with his whole army, and drive Buller down to the ships at Durban."

"Well, we shall see," Yorke said. "We are not likely to convince each other. Where do you send your prisoners to?"

"To Pretoria. A good many of them are already there —seven or eight hundred from Natal, six hundred from Stormberg—and this is only the beginning. We have a few others we picked up here; I expect you will all be sent off in a day or two. I don't think you will be badly off at first; but when we get Buller's men and the men here, safely stowed

away, you will hardly be as well off, for I should say that there will be a difficulty in getting provisions for twenty thousand men or so. But perhaps there won't be so many, for I hear that we have killed over twenty thousand, and we have only lost twenty or thirty men."

"But I should think that at least you here cannot believe the last item," Yorke said. "Something like a hundred bodies have been fished out of the Modder, and there is no doubt that a still greater number were carried off the field. I don't say that you lost as heavily as we did; but when I say that you had two hundred killed, without counting Magersfontein, I feel sure that I am under the mark."

"Oh! there may be some mistake about the thirty," the Boer said with a grim smile. "Still, you have certainly lost a great many more than we have; even at Belmont and Graspan, though you did turn us out of our kopjes, you lost at least five to our one."

"That may be true enough. But a force attacking across the open must always lose more than men who shoot them down from behind rocks, and who have their horses close by on which they can gallop away as soon as they find that they are getting the worst of it. If we ever get you in the open I fancy that your losses will be as heavy as ours."

"We should be fools if we let you," the Boer said. "We are too slim for that. We fight on our own ground."

"Yes; but if you invade Cape Colony, as you talk about, we shall be fighting on ground of our choosing, and you will find out the difference then."

Three days later Yorke started, with some fifteen other prisoners, one of whom was an officer, for Bloemfontein. They were placed in light carts and guarded by twenty Boers on horseback. The officer, who had been captured a fortnight before, said to Yorke after they had introduced themselves to each other:

"I am glad to meet someone who can give me a true account of what has taken place since I was captured. Of course I

did not believe the Boer reports, but they were serious enough to make me feel very uneasy, for if there were any truth in them, even allowing for exaggeration, it certainly seemed that we must have been awfully cut up."

"The casualties have been heavy, but certainly not greater than would be expected, considering that the Boers held very strong positions, from which we turned them out three times. The fourth time, however, our attack failed. I can't tell you exactly the number of casualties, but I do not think altogether they exceeded one thousand six hundred, and of these nearly a thousand occurred in the last fight."

He then gave a full account of each battle.

"Thank you! It is bad enough that we have been stopped, and shall not be able to move again until reinforcements come up; still, it is not so bad as I feared. We certainly underrated the fighting power of the Boers; and the foreign engineer, who directs the making of their entrenchments, must be a very clever fellow, for that plan of making the trench well out in the plain in front of their kopjes was a capital one, and as far as I know quite new."

"Yes, there never was a more complete surprise; and although poor Wauchope fell into the trap, he can hardly be blamed for not taking precautions against an entirely new plan of defence. If it hadn't been for that I believe we should have captured the position without heavy loss, for once among the boulders on the hillside our troops could have fought their way up under partial shelter; and, as far as we have seen, the Boers do not attempt to make a stand when once we get near them."

"I am afraid Kimberley must fall," the officer, whose name was D'Arcy, said.

"I do not think that there is any fear of that. They have provisions enough to last them, if pushed to it, for three months."

"That is good news. But are you sure?"

"Quite, for I was there myself ten days ago."

"You were there? How on earth did you manage to get out?"

"I will tell you that to-night," Yorke laughed. "I have been talking steadily for the past two hours, and what with the heat and dust I don't feel in form to begin again now. I suppose we shall get to Bloemfontein the day after to-morrow; it is about eighty miles, I think."

"Somewhere about that, I suppose. From there we shall be sent up by train to Pretoria. It will be a pleasant change, for what with these carts and the Boers' horses we might as well be living in the middle of a dust-storm, except that we can keep our hats on our heads."

They were indeed heartily glad when they arrived at Bloemfontein. They were taken direct to the railway-station, where a number of the prisoners captured at Stormberg were confined, and on the following morning the whole party started by train to Pretoria. There were several officers, and these were all placed in a carriage by themselves. They had been permitted to buy tobacco at Bloemfontein. Having now recovered to some extent from their disgust at being made prisoners, they were disposed to view things in a more cheerful light. As Yorke was the only one among them who had been with Methuen's column, all were anxious to hear his account of what had happened on that side, and he had again to repeat his story of the fights and of his journey to Kimberley.

"You were in the action at Magersfontein," one said. "I suppose that as you were on the staff you did not see very much of it?"

"Not much. But I was sent with a message to Lord Airlie, and when he ordered the two squadrons of the 12th Lancers to go forward to cover the flank of the Highland Brigade I followed them for some distance, and remained near until the Horse Artillery came up to the support, and the Coldstreams and Grenadiers took up the line between the Highlanders and the river. I afterwards carried messages twice to the Highland Brigade. Still, of course, I saw nothing of

the early fighting, if it can be called fighting, for the Scotchmen were all lying down, and but few shots were returned on their part to the storm of bullets which passed over their heads, for every shot was sure to be answered by a dozen rifles from the Boer trenches. My escape was a miracle. My horse was grazed twice, my saddle was struck, and I had two bullet-holes through my clothes and one through my helmet. I did not remain long, you may be sure. I saw that the Highlanders were showing no signs of giving way, and that the Boers seemed equally unwilling to advance. That was the principal object of my mission. As for finding out who was the officer in command, it was impossible. No man knew anything of what was passing ten yards from him. Some said they believed all the officers were killed. This, of course, was not so; but, as I afterwards learned, no fewer than forty-six officers fell, for the most part in the first terrible outburst of fire. Now, will you tell me about Stormberg?"

"There is very little to tell," the other officer said bitterly. "The fact that we were going to make a night attack was known in the camp the night before, and of course the Boers heard of it; and when we arrived at daybreak—after wandering about completely worn out and exhausted by what was really a five or six hours' march, but seemed like a month—a tremendous fire was poured in upon us. Some of us dashed up the hill on one side, some up the other. The place, however, was inaccessible, and we were being shot down without any power to retaliate. The order came to retreat. A great many of us were lying under the shelter of a perpendicular rock, which we could not leave without being exposed to the fire of the Boers above us and those on the opposite side. If the men had been fresh, the effort would have been made, but they were too worn-out and dispirited, and so we were captured. The guns and the Irish Rifles covered the retreat of the rest. But if the Boers had been as enterprising as they were crafty they might have cut the whole off, and not a man would have returned to Molteno to tell the story.

"It was a sickening business altogether; we made blunder upon blunder. The order for the march should not have been issued until we were paraded. The troops should have rested all day and taken food with them. The trucks should have been ready for us to entrain when we marched down to the railway. We ought to have had better guides. There ought to have been an advance-guard a quarter of a mile ahead. It was known that the Boer position was strong, and that the enemy were at least as numerous as we were, so we should have been brought up to fight fresh and in good condition, instead of being exhausted, fagged out, and dispirited by a tedious night march. Altogether our business seems to have been very much like yours at Magersfontein, where you were surprised just as we were, and where the men were already exhausted from want of food, a night spent in the pouring rain, and a dispiriting night march. I hope to Heaven when the next fight takes place that there will be no more of this night marching, but that the troops will have a chance of going into action fresh, well fed, and in good condition. Even in a flat country, without obstacles, a night march is always a very ticklish business, as you found at Belmont, where, as you say, the regiments lost their bearing and attacked the wrong hills. But in a hilly country, with bad maps and guides of doubtful honesty, it is almost certain to lead to disaster."

After twenty-four hours of tedious travelling the train arrived at Pretoria, and the officers were marched off to one prison and the men to another. The building was a small one, but some huts had been erected in the yard. The prison already contained the officers who had been captured at Nicholson's Nek in Natal, and the first batch of those taken at Stormberg, and hearty greetings were exchanged by their companions in misfortune, who pressed eagerly round asking for news. It took some time to exhaust the budget, and although the news was far from good, they were well satisfied, for they too had heard the most exaggerated reports of the Boer victories from their guards.

"Now," the new-comers asked, "how do you get on here?"

"We are fairly well fed, but a good deal crowded; but they are talking of sending us to the race-course. Our great difficulty is to pass the time. We have bought a few balls and play at fives. We play cards, but as no one has more than a few shillings in his pocket, we don't play for money, and that takes away a good deal of the interest. You see, we don't want to lose what little we have got, or to win anyone else's. If more prisoners come in, and the provisions begin to run short in the town—which they are likely enough to do, for there is no one to work on the fields now or to get in the crops—the money will come in very handy. Some of us were stripped altogether of our cash, but in most cases the Boers, although they took our gold or left us at most a sovereign, let us keep the silver. I suppose their theory was, that in the first place gold was better in their pockets than in ours; and in the second, that it was safer to deprive us of the means of bribing any of our warders. They were wise there, for, judging by their appearance, the majority of the guards are unmitigated ruffians, the Irish and German scum of the place—the sort of men who would do anything for a ten-pound note."

Yorke for the first time regretted, when he heard this, that he had as usual left his money with the paymaster. There had been nothing to buy since he had left De Aar, and he felt sure that, if suspected when scouting, the fact of his having money about him would add to the suspicion that he was not what he seemed. He therefore handed over his money to the officer who acted as paymaster to Rimington's Scouts, and had, only two days before, drawn it from him and handed it to the paymaster at head-quarters, retaining only some five or six shillings; as his messing account would come in only once a week, and he could then draw sufficient to pay it. He had congratulated himself on this when he was captured, but he now wished that he had made a point of concealing a few pounds somewhere about him. It would not have been a very serious loss if it had been taken from him, and if he

now had it, it would be invaluable if he could find any opportunity of making his escape.

"Have there been any attempts at escape?" he asked.

"Yes. Winston Churchill managed it, but not from this prison. Two of our fellows got away, but the result is that we are looked after a good deal sharper than we were. We are all locked up in our rooms at nine o'clock; there are four fellows always on guard in the yard night and day; I believe there are others round the wall. Besides, you see, even if one could get away, one's difficulties would only then begin. A disguise would have to be got, and that cannot be bought without money. In the next place, there is not a soul among us who can speak their beastly language, and, as we should have to buy food, we should be detected at once."

"I shall escape if I can," Yorke said; "for I speak Taal well enough to pass anywhere, and once outside I could make my way across the country, even if I had to steal a Dutchman's coat. Still, after what you say, I see that an escape can hardly be managed without money to bribe some of the warders."

"Go by all means, if you can," the officer said. "You won't injure us, for our case is hopeless now, and until we hear our bugles blowing there is not a shadow of a chance of our getting away."

CHAPTER XIII

FRIENDS

A WEEK later the jails in the town were emptied, and the prisoners taken to the race-course. Some rough wooden huts had been erected for the men, and the officers were to use the grand-stand.

"At least we shall have a good view from the top," one of the officers laughed. "We shall see our fellows coming a long

way off, and the bombardment of the forts, which will, I expect, be the first thing done. I hope that if the Boers fight they will make their last stand well away from the town. It would be maddening if there were to be a battle going on before our eyes and we not able to help."

The strictness of the watch was in no way relaxed. Men constantly paraded the enclosure, which was formed of strong palisades. Others kept watch outside, where several ranges of barbed wire, to which empty tins were attached in such a way as to make a clatter at the slightest motion, seemed to render it impossible to get out without giving the alarm, even if the palisade were scaled. The time passed heavily, in spite of the efforts of the officers to amuse themselves. With make-shift stumps, bats, and balls they played cricket, and the men in their part of the grounds did the same. They ran races, had high and wide jumps, played rounders, and did their best to keep up their spirits, but it was heavy work. The subject of the war was avoided as much as possible. It was maddening to know that fierce battles might be going on while they had lost all opportunity of sharing in them, and that when their friends, on their return, asked what share they had taken in the fighting, they could only reply that they were captured in one of the first fights and had seen nothing of the war afterwards.

Ten days after they had been moved, one of the guards, as he sauntered past Yorke, coughed, not in a natural way, but as if to call his attention. Yorke looked round with apparent carelessness, as other guards might have their eye upon him. The man passed on without looking at him, but Yorke had difficulty in restraining a shout of delight when he recognized Hans. At first he could scarcely believe his eyes, but as the man lounged away, he recognized the figure beyond the shadow of doubt. He sat down upon the ground, took out his pipe and filled it, and when Hans again came past he asked him for a light.

"Where is your room, Master Yorke?" Hans asked, as he fumbled in his pocket.

"It is at the other side of the house—the door nearest to the right-hand corner looking at it from here."

"I shall want time to think it out, Master Yorke. I only got taken on to-day. I will speak to you again to-morrow." So, striking a match and handing it to Yorke, Hans went away.

Yorke felt that great caution must be used in speaking to Hans, for as a new hand he might be watched for a time to see that he did not communicate with the prisoners. He lay back on the ground, pulled his hat forward as if to shade his face, and tried to think things over. Even now he could scarcely believe it possible that Hans could have travelled all the way from the Modder to Pretoria. He knew how warmly the faithful fellow was attached to him, but not for a moment, while thinking over every conceivable way of escape, had it occurred to him that Hans would have come to his relief. Hans was a slow thinker, and he should not have given him credit for his undertaking such an enterprise; and even now that he had succeeded in making the journey and in getting himself engaged as a guard, he felt sure that he could not have the slightest idea as to what his next step should be. Getting up after a time, he went back to the room where he and eight officers slept.

It had formerly been an office of some sort, and the outside door opened directly into it. Hitherto he had not examined the lock, for the palisade and the wire fences beyond it offered such impregnable obstacles that the mere question of getting in and out of the room was of secondary importance. He now saw that there would be no great difficulty in shooting the bolt of the lock on the inside, but there were strong staples with a bar and padlock outside. These had evidently been put on only when it was decided to transform the grand-stand into a prison. His pocket-book had not been taken from him; it had a pencil attached, and he now wrote:

I was delighted to see you. Even with your help it will be very difficult for me to make an escape. Of course, nothing whatever can

be done before you happen to be on night guard and be posted near my door. I can force the bolt of the lock inside. There is a padlock outside, and you will either require a file to cut through the staple, or a strong steel bar with which you could wrench it off; but the file would be the easier. With a short rope I could climb the palisade, but the difficulty is the barbed wire outside. I will think over what can best be done with that, and will let you know. Of course I shall want a disguise to put on if I escape; it must be a very dark night when we attempt it. I have no money; have you any?

Having torn out the leaf and folded it up small, he went out again, strolled down to the palisade, and looked through it at the wires with their pendent tins. "It would be an awful job to get over them even without the tins, but with them it seems altogether impossible to do it without noise," he thought to himself. "I am very much afraid Hans has made his journey in vain." He opened the little bit of paper and added:

I shall need a little bottle of oil so as to shoot the bolt without making a noise, and you will want one to help you to file through the staple.

Hans came on duty again at twelve o'clock. Yorke did not go near him for an hour, then he repeated the performance of the previous day, and as Hans held out his match-box to him he slipped the tiny folded paper into his hand, and presently sauntered back to his companions and joined in a game of rounders.

That evening when they were locked in their rooms he told the others: "It must seem to you madness, but I have made up my mind to try and escape. I know that I may be shot in doing so, but I mean to try."

"But the thing is impossible, Harberton," one of them said. "It will simply be throwing away your life."

"I am perfectly aware that it is very dangerous, but I have made up my mind to risk it. Why I tell you is that

I don't wish to do anything that would cause greater precautions to be taken, and so make it still harder for anyone else to escape."

"It could not be harder than it is," one of them said; "so if you can hit upon any plan of escape, by all means try it. You can speak Dutch well, and might get off. But if you could take us all out with you I would not try, for the betting against one's making one's way across the frontier unless speaking the language is at least a thousand to one. They might not make any extraordinary fuss about one fellow getting off, but if eight of us were to do so they would scour the country everywhere and telegraph all over the place."

"I think it is, as you say, a piece of madness," another said. "Of course, if you are willing to try, we don't want to prevent you; but you may be assured that, even should you by a miracle succeed, none of us would care to take the chances of getting out of the country. Of course Mafeking is the nearest point, but there are Boers all round it. While I regard it as impossible that you should get out, I consider it would be still more impossible for any of us to make our way across the frontier if we escaped with you."

"Thank you!" Yorke said quietly. "Certainly I mean to try, but I did not wish you to regard me as a cad for going away and not giving you a chance to escape with me. If you had expressed your opinion that my escape, if effected, would in any way make things more unpleasant for the others, I should have given up my idea at once."

There was a murmur of approval among his hearers. "It is a very proper spirit, Harberton," the senior of the party said. "I know it has always been considered that a prisoner of war has a right to make his escape if he can, although such an escape may render the watch over the others more rigorous. Still, I think myself that it is a selfish and ungenerous action for any man to take, unless he is sure that others will not suffer for it. However, in the present case the watch is so close, and the obstacles to be overcome are so great, both in

getting out and in making one's way across the country, that in no way could the escape of one officer add to the rigour of the imprisonment of the rest. Frankly, as far as I can see, bribery is the only possible means of escape, and unless you have a secret store, and that an abundant one, you can hardly hope to succeed with any of these fellows, for there is no question that they hate us bitterly."

"I am not thinking of that method. My resources at present are represented by four shillings, which would not be sufficient, I think, to tempt any warder to give me his assistance. I am by no means sure that I shall get away, but if I do, it will be with the assistance of a friend in the town. I do not wish to say more, because after I am gone —that is, if I do go—questions may be asked, and it would be best that, instead of refusing to answer them, you should be able to say that you knew nothing of the manner in which I had escaped, nor who had assisted me."

Yorke again strolled down to the palisade and stood looking through it thoughtfully for some time. The fences outside were certainly as awkward obstacles as could be imagined. The posts were six feet high; the wires were about eight inches apart, and the barbs a little more than six inches. On each wire were hung three tin cans between each post. There were three lines of fencing. The lowest wire was four inches above the ground, differing from the others only in having no tins attached to it, there not being depth enough for them to hang. Suddenly the puzzled look on Yorke's face was succeeded by one of satisfaction.

"It is as good as done!" he exclaimed. "With a strong pair of nippers the bottom wire can be cut, and that will leave a sufficient space to crawl under. There will be about a foot clear between the ground and the next wire. After deducting an inch for the barb, there are still eleven inches, and lying perfectly flat one ought to be able to crawl under that, taking care to avoid the tins."

That day and the two days following Yorke did not go

near Hans. One of the other guards might notice the latter talking two or three days in succession to the same prisoner. On the third day he again placed himself in his way and handed him a note.

Get a strong pair of wire-nippers. Let the rope be about eighteen feet long. There is nothing else I shall want to enable us to get away. If you can get another rifle and ammunition, and hide them some little distance from the prison, all the better. I shall save some food—enough, I hope, to last for two or three days. You had better bring some in your pocket too. There will be no moon on Monday next, and if you are on guard that night near my door we had better try then. At eleven o'clock I shall be listening for the sound of your file. If I do not hear it by half-past eleven I shall suppose that you are posted somewhere else, but I shall listen three or four nights before, and every night after that, at the same hour. I shall not write again. It is better that we should not be noticed speaking to each other, so pay no attention to me unless you have something particular to say.

As he gave the paper to Hans, the latter slipped into his hand a small tin oil-can, one of those used for oiling sewing-machines and bicycles, and also a paper of tobacco. "If I am asked why I was speaking to you," Hans muttered, "I can say you asked me to buy you a quarter of a pound of tobacco."

It was well the precaution had been taken, for a minute later one of the other guards came up and asked roughly, "What did that man give you?"

Yorke assumed a look of surprise, put his hand in his pocket, and took out the little parcel.

"There it is," he said. "It is a quarter of a pound of tobacco. I asked him to get the best he could buy. I hope that he has done so, but I have not tried it."

He opened it carelessly, and the guard glanced at it, and then went away satisfied with the explanation.

"It is just as well," Yorke said to himself, "that I told Hans

not to come near me again. Evidently that fellow had some sort of suspicion, and must have seen him speak to me before, for there is nothing unusual in the guard fetching us little things we want. There is certainly nothing suspicious about Hans' appearance. He has evidently not washed his face for days, and looks as dirty as any of them."

The time passed as usual till three days before the date appointed. For four days Yorke had not seen Hans, who had been put on night guard. Each evening he had gone to the door at eleven, and listened for half an hour without hearing any sound. He had hidden away one of the table-knives. On the Monday evening he heard, to his delight, a low grating sound, and knocked gently three times to let Hans know that he heard him. In half an hour he heard the bar cautiously removed, and with his knife at once shot back the bolt and opened the door.

The night was pitch-dark, and after silently grasping his follower's hand, Yorke went on to his hands and knees, and began to crawl down the slope towards the palisade.

"Where are the sentries, Hans?" he asked, when they had nearly reached it.

"There is one at each corner of the stand, and one on each side."

"I meant outside the wires."

"There are six or eight of them, and they keep on marching round and round. When one of the field-cornets visited the sentries the other night, he found three asleep. So the orders were that no one should sit down or stand still, but keep on going round and round, keeping as nearly as they could the same distance apart. But I don't see how we are to get through the wires."

"I see my way as to that, Hans. Have you got the nippers?"

"Yes, Master Yorke, here they are."

"Now, don't say another word till we are outside, but just do as I tell you."

Hans was well content with the order, for he had several times surveyed the fencing, and could see no possibility of getting over without not only being torn by the barbs, but also giving the alarm. He had, however, not troubled himself very much about it, having implicit confidence in Yorke. They came down upon the palisade about half-way between two corners.

"Give me the rope, Hans," the latter whispered. He cut it in half, and made a slip-knot at one end of each piece. Both had taken off their boots before starting.

"Now," Yorke went on, when the two pieces of rope were ready, "do you climb on to my shoulder and put these two loops round the top of one of the stakes. Let one hang down on this side, and the other outside. When you have fixed them, climb up and lower yourself by the rope to the ground. Be sure you do not make any noise. As soon as you are over, I will follow. You had better lie down as soon as you touch the ground."

As Hans was able to reach the top of the palisade from Yorke's shoulders, he could carry out the order without noise. Yorke himself then climbed up by the rope. He had rather doubted whether Hans would be able to accomplish this, as, though strong, he was unaccustomed to anything like athletic exercise. To Yorke, however, the matter was easy. When he reached the other side, he lay down.

"Lie quiet till I tell you, Hans."

The nearest fence was six feet from the palisade. Finding one of the posts, Yorke cut the lowest wire close to it. Then he cut it again some four feet away from the post, and carefully dragged the severed portion farther along. He had thought that this would be the best plan, as, if he tried to coil the wire up, it might spring back again and strike one of the tins on the line above. These tins were for the most part hung half-way between posts, as the vibration there would be greatest.

When he had this done, he whispered to Hans: "There is room enough to crawl under the wire now, but you must lie

perfectly flat, or you will be caught by the barbs. Push your hat through in front of you first. If you should catch, don't try to move; you would set the tins ringing. I will come and free you. But if you are careful, you ought to have no trouble. I can get through easily enough."

The next line was five yards outside the inner one, and as soon as Hans was through the first fence, Yorke proceeded to cut the lower wire as before.

"Lie where you are till I have cleared the way through the outside fence," he whispered to Hans. "Dark as it is, they might see us if there were two of us together."

While the work was going on, the sentries had passed frequently. They followed each other, however, at somewhat long intervals. As they sauntered along slowly, smoking their pipes, and occasionally humming a hymn tune, they kept some fifteen or twenty yards outside the boundary fence, so as to be sure that in the dark they should not run against it, and not only tear their clothes, but by shaking the tins give a false alarm. To facilitate this, lanterns had been placed at this distance away from each corner, so that as soon as they passed one they could see the gleam of another and walk straight for it. Yorke waited till two of the guard were about equally distant from where he was lying before cutting the last wire, and was very careful in using a steady pressure on the pliers, so as to prevent their closing in with a click. This time, instead of risking the second cut, he crawled along some little distance with the end, then he gave a low hiss, and Hans was soon beside him.

"Now, Hans, we will go together. They certainly cannot see us here, so we will crawl under this last wire, and then lie still till the next guard passes. Wait till he has gone twenty yards, then stand up and make a dash. Run as lightly as you can; but even if he hears us, we shall be out of sight before he can unsling his rifle and fire."

Crawling under the wire, they remained as flat as possible on the ground until the next sentry passed. They could

scarcely make out the outline of his figure. They waited till he had quite disappeared, then Yorke pressed his follower's hand. They rose to their feet and quietly made off. Their footsteps were almost inaudible, even to themselves, on the sandy soil. As soon as they were past the line the sentries were following they quickened their steps, and after going fifty yards broke into a run. They were free now. There had been no challenge by the guards on either side of them, no pause in the slow dull tread of their heavy boots. They had run a hundred yards when Yorke said: "Now, which way, Hans? Have you got a rifle for me?"

"Yes, master, I got two from a lot that were standing against the wall of a drinking-shop while their owners were inside."

"What did you get two for, Hans? You brought your own out with you, didn't you?"

"Yes, but Peter wanted one too."

"Peter!" Yorke repeated in surprise. "What Peter?"

"Long Peter, master."

"What! has he come with you?"

"Yes, it was he who came to me and said, 'You know the baas has been taken prisoner?' I said, 'Yes, I heard it this morning.' 'Then,' he said, 'we must go and get him out of the hands of the Boers.' I had not thought of such a thing then; but, of course, I said I was ready. So I went in and told the colonel I wanted to go, and he gave me leave. Then I put on my farm clothes, and got yours from your room. Peter had said that I had better ride, so I mounted my horse and came off."

"Where is he now, Hans?"

"He is at that little house about a quarter of a mile from the other side of the race-course. It is empty, and he is there with your clothes and the horse and some food. We must take a turn and go round there."

"It won't be easy to find it on such a dark night," Yorke said.

"We shall find it easily enough," Hans replied confidently. "Peter pointed out to me that from the door the two lanterns on this side were just in a line, so that when we came round, we should only have to keep them so, and we should come straight to the house."

"The Kaffir is a sharp fellow as well as a faithful one," Yorke said. "It is well we have a guide to the house, for otherwise we might have searched about till daybreak. A horse would not matter so much, but without the disguise I could not hope to get away."

In a few minutes they arrived at the house. A native was standing at the door holding a horse.

"You are a first-rate fellow, Peter," Yorke said as he shook him warmly by the hand, "a downright brick, to have made this long journey, and run no end of risk to get me out. I am lucky indeed to have two such friends as you and Hans."

"We could not stop there, baas, and know that you were in prison," the native said simply. "Not very difficult to get here, for we travel always at night. Which way shall we go now?"

"I have been thinking it over, and have decided that we had better go down to Johannesburg. It is a large town, and people are sure to be there from all parts, and we shall be less noticed. What do you think, Hans?"

"That is what I have been thinking too, Master Yorke."

"Do you know how the road lies from here, Peter?"

"Yes, baas; we sweep round the town three or four miles, then come on the road."

"Do you think you could find your way all right?"

"Quite sure to find it, baas; cloud clearing off, soon have stars come out."

"Then we will start at once; we are not likely to meet anyone on the road. If we keep on we shall be half-way there by daylight, we can then decide what we shall do. Now, where are the things?"

"In this bundle, baas. I have them ready, because if I had

heard shots fired I should have run with the horse in that direction so as to meet you."

Yorke did not wait to take off his uniform, but slipped the Boer clothes over it.

"Now, where are the provisions?" he asked.

"In the bag behind the saddle," the Kaffir said. "Four blankets tied in front, one for each of us and one for horse."

"That is right. We had better lead the horse for the next half-mile, for on a still night like this they might hear the sound if we were to trot. I don't say that they would give the alarm, as they could not say who it was: but if they were to discover that we had gone they might remember that they heard a horse, and so guess the line we had taken.

They went quietly along for a quarter of an hour, then Yorke said: "We are far enough off now. I will mount here. When you are tired, Hans, you can take my place and I will walk." But Hans laughed. "I can keep on any time," he said, "but I will let you know if I am tired."

They proceeded slowly for the next half-hour, when, as the Kaffir had predicted, the clouds cleared off and the stars came out.

"Now we can go on fast, baas."

"Then you had better get up behind me, Hans, the horse must have had little to do lately, and he can carry double very well; we shall thus gain a lot of time, and he will have another rest at Johannesburg."

The Kaffir ran on lightly ahead, and at a trot the horse followed. In half an hour they came on the road south, and maintaining the pace, and breaking occasionally into a walk for a short distance, they kept on till morning broke. It was half-past twelve when they started, and by four they had done twenty-five miles and were within ten miles of Johannesburg.

"I think we may as well push on to the town," Yorke said. "If we were to leave the road and take to the veldt, people might notice us from the farmhouses and wonder what we were doing there."

"I think so too, Master Yorke. I travelled by night coming here, because the horse is too good for a rough Boer to be riding. I will get off now and walk beside it, that will look natural enough. You are a young Boer farmer and I am one of the farm hands, and you are going to Johannesburg to buy things you want, and have brought one of your Kaffirs to carry it back; no one would think twice about it."

"That will certainly be best, Hans; they cannot know yet that anything is wrong at the prison, and the fact that the lower wires are cut will not be noticed for some time later. I pulled up the rope inside the enclosure and dropped it outside before I slid down, so the alarm is not likely to be given until they go to open the door of my room. We put the bar in its place when we closed it. At any rate, we may calculate that it will be fully seven o'clock before the alarm is given outside the prison. Even if they telegraph direct to Johannesburg to keep a look-out for me, we should be in the town before the message arrives. They will no doubt suspect that you were with me, for they will see that the staple has been filed through on the outside, and as you will be missing when they relieve the guard at six o'clock, probably your description will be sent out with mine. When we get to the town I will go in with Peter only; you had better not follow the road, but go round and enter the town at some other point."

Hans agreed that that would be the best plan, and, dismounting and taking hold of Yorke's stirrup-leather, trotted alongside. When within two miles of Johannesburg they saw two mounted Boers coming along in the distance, and at once broke into a walk. When they met the Boers the latter were engaged in conversation, and paid no attention to the party beyond returning Yorke's salutation. They met no one else until within a quarter of a mile of the town. Hans here left the others. Peter, who had hidden his rifle in his clothes since they had first seen the two Boers approach them, now concealed it in a bush twenty yards from the road. It

would have been out of character altogether for a native to carry arms in the Transvaal. Yorke rode on as soon as this had been done. He found the principal streets comparatively deserted. The greater portion of the stores were closed; many of these had their doors open and broken, showing that forcible entry had been made and their contents carried away. Some of the hotels were closed, others were open; but the uncleaned windows and the general appearance of untidiness showed that there were but few people staying there, and that their owners kept them open as a matter of policy rather than of gain. Yorke dismounted before a second-rate-looking establishment, Peter took the reins and led the horse into the yard. A Kaffir boy came out from the stables.

"Put the horse in," Yorke, who followed, said, "I may be staying here for a day or two."

After seeing this done he went into the house. "I want some breakfast," he said in Dutch to an untidy-looking German who sauntered into the hall. "I shall want a bed to-night."

"All right!" the man said; "you can go upstairs and choose any room you like, they are all empty. I suppose bacon and eggs will do for breakfast? I have nothing else except canned meat."

"Bacon and eggs will do very well."

"They will be ready in a quarter of an hour," the man said.

"I have put my horse in the stable," Yorke went on. "Is there any news?"

"Yes, we have beaten Buller again. I suppose you have heard that?"

"No, our farm is out of the way of news. When was it?"

"On the 27th, at least that was the last of it. We were fighting for a week, and they say that pretty near half of them were killed. They took a strong hill called Spion Kop, but we drove them out again. Buller has recrossed the Tugela, and I expect now that they will give up in Ladysmith, as we know that they are starving, and there is no longer any

chance of Buller getting in. He must know that himself by this time. It will be our turn next, and when Ladysmith surrenders we shall chase Buller down to Durban."

By the tone in which the man spoke Yorke could see that he did not put any very great faith in the story he was telling.

"That is good news," he said heartily. "I am sorry I was not down there when the others went; I could not be spared at home. My mother is not strong, and could not look after the Kaffirs and the cattle."

"You are out of luck," the man said.

"Well, I might have got shot, you know, if I had been there."

"Not much risk of that," the man replied, "for they say that the Rooineks cannot shoot, and that we kill a hundred of them to every one they hit."

"They must shoot badly indeed if that is the case."

"Well, I don't say it is so, but that is what they tell us; and as Kruger says so, and the newspapers say so, of course we must believe it. I don't trouble about it one way or the other. My boss went down to Bloemfontein a month ago and left me here in charge. It is little enough I have to do, for your people are not given much to pay for liquor, especially when they can get as much as they like by breaking open the door of a store, and it ain't once a week that a bed is wanted. Still, if the place had been shut up, it would have been looted like the rest of the empty houses. It is dull work enough, for there is only myself and the Kaffir woman who cooks. Well, I had better go and see about your breakfast."

While Yorke ate his breakfast the German, who was evidently glad to have someone to talk to, sat down on a table and smoked.

"I suppose," he said, "you have come from somewhere near Heidelberg?"

"No," Yorke replied, "I have come from the south. I don't know whether you know the country between the Klip River and Blesbok Spruit?"

"No, I have never been there."

"Ah! then you would not know the farm. It is not very far from where the two rivers fall into the Vaal, twenty miles or so below Heidelberg."

"I suppose your people are with the Heidelberg commando?"

Yorke nodded.

"Well, I don't know much about war," the German said, "for I slipped away from home before my time came to join the army, and I am not likely to return; but it certainly seems to me queer that, though it is more than three months since the business began, you have not taken either Ladysmith, Kimberley, or Mafeking yet; and yet your people made sure that by this time they would be at Durban on one side, and Cape Town on the other. It has been badly managed."

"Very badly managed," Yorke agreed. "If it had been left to Joubert to do as he liked, things would have gone differently, but he was interfered with by Kruger, and Steyn, and all Kruger's people here. I was very sorry at first that I could not go with the others to Natal, but I begin to think I am better off at home than they are. Besides, after all it does not matter to me whether we drive the Rooineks out or not. As far as I can see they have done no harm; we get a lot more for our cattle now than we did before they came, and if they were all to go, prices would fall again."

"You are right," the German said; "hotel-keeping would not be a paying game with us if all the Uitlanders were driven out. So far, I reckon that, what with the hotels and stores being closed and most of the mines shut down, and almost all the men with money gone, this town is millions of pounds poorer than it was last year. You seem a sensible young fellow, but most of your people are so unreasonable that there is no talking with them. They know very little themselves, and believe everything that is told them. Of course we who live here are obliged to seem to agree with them, but we don't at heart believe that things are going to

turn out as they fancy. They know nothing about England, and we do. When I first left Germany I went there and learned my business as a waiter in a hotel in London, and I know something about them, and how they put down that great mutiny in India. I fancy it will be the same thing here."

By this time Yorke had finished his breakfast, and, saying that he might as well have a look round and see about getting the stores he wanted, he took his hat, and, telling the German that he would be in about one o'clock to dinner, went out.

CHAPTER XIV

A BAND OF SCOUNDRELS

ON sallying out Yorke was joined by Peter, as had been arranged. The native kept a short distance behind him, carrying a large basket which he had, at Yorke's orders, bought. Fortunately, they had no difficulty about cash, as Hans, who had not drawn any money from the time of his first enlistment, had obtained three months' pay before starting. Walking up the main street, which was comparatively deserted, they saw a group of people before one of the Government offices, and, going up, Yorke read a telegram from Pretoria, stating that a British officer had, during the night, effected his escape from prison, and that he had been aided by one of the prison guards, who was also missing. All were enjoined to keep a look-out for them, and to arrest them when discovered. A description was given of their appearance.

"They will not get far," a Boer standing next to Yorke said; "the Rooinek is young, and certainly will not be able to speak our language."

"There can be no doubt about that," Yorke agreed. "He must be a sharp fellow, though, to have escaped, for, from what I heard from one who had seen the prison, it would be

next to impossible for anyone to get away, as there were sentries night and day, and three lines of barbed-wire fencing outside the palisade."

"He will be caught, sure enough," another said. "No doubt they will shoot him. If I had had the management of things I would have shot them all as soon as they were taken."

"I don't know about that," Yorke replied. "They have not taken many of ours at present, but they may do, and if we shoot prisoners, they would do the same."

"They will never take any prisoners," the man said scornfully; "none of our men would ever surrender. Besides, as we always beat them, they would have no chance of taking prisoners."

"That is so," Yorke agreed; "still, I don't know that I agree with you that we should shoot prisoners. You see, the soldiers have to fight as they are told, and they are not to be blamed because their government makes them fight against us."

Yorke now edged out of the little crowd and joined Peter. He walked about the town for some hours, and at one went back and had dinner. He then went out again, and on leaving the hotel, saw Hans standing a short distance away, but paid no attention to him, as it had been agreed that they should not recognize each other as long as they were in Johannesburg. Hans, however, rather to his surprise and annoyance, followed him at a short distance down the street. After proceeding a little farther, Yorke turned off from the main street and walked some distance towards the outskirts of the town. As Hans still followed, Yorke stopped at a quiet spot where no one was in sight.

"What is it, Hans?" he asked when the other came up. "I thought we had agreed that we were not to recognize each other so long as we stayed here."

"I understood that, Master Yorke, but there is something I wanted to tell you."

"Well, what is it, Hans?"

"You know there are a good many rough fellows here,

chiefly Irishmen and Germans, who have managed under some excuse or other to avoid having to go to fight."

Yorke nodded.

"Well, as you told me, I went to a small drinking-shop. There were four or five fellows of this sort there. They stopped talking when I went in, and as soon as I sat down one of them came over to me and said in Dutch, 'Do you understand English?' I thought it best to shake my head, and he went back to the others and said in English, 'The fellow talks nothing but Taal, so we needn't disturb ourselves about him.' 'All right!' another said, 'he looks as stupid as most of these Dutchmen do; I suppose he has come in from some country farm. Still, we may as well make ourselves safe;' and he called to the landlord. 'We will go to that room behind,' he said; 'we have got some business that we want to talk over;' and, getting up, they left the room. The house was built of wood, and I heard their entry into the room behind me almost as plainly as if I had been there, and, taking off my hat and holding it in readiness if I should hear the landlord returning, I placed my ear against the partition, and listened intently. Relying alike upon my ignorance of English, my being half-drunk, and their being in another room, the men did not lower their voices, and I was able to catch nearly all they said. I don't know why I troubled about it, it was no business of mine; but they were a rough lot, and the fact that they were so anxious that I should not hear them made me want to do so, and I think it is lucky I did. What I heard was this:—

"'Well, Grunstein, go on with what you were saying.'

"'I was telling you about Chambers, the president of the Parfontein mine. I learned from one of my countrymen who was working there, that the last month before war began they pushed the mine for all it was worth—took men off the levels they were driving, and put every hand on to get the stuff down in the rich places, and kept all the stamps working on their best stuff. One of the men who works in the

place where they run the gold into blocks told me that they must have got at least a quarter of a million pounds' worth of gold. It was taken up as usual every night to the president's house, but he declares that it was never sent to the bank, and that he is sure the whole, or at any rate by far the greater part of it, is there still. Chambers himself has not left. I suppose he bribed Kruger to let him stop without being interfered with. He has his wife and two daughters there, and three servants, two of them Germans and one an Irishman. We have already got at them, it was better to do so, although we could easily settle them. Anyhow, my plan is to get a score of men we can rely upon, and attack the house. It is near the mine, and far enough away from the town to prevent any firing being heard.'

"'Anyhow, we need not bother about that, as Muller has squared the three men-servants. He has promised them an equal share in the plunder; and it is a good thing that it was arranged so, because we shall be able to carry out the affair, I hope, without a gun being fired. We are to be there at nine o'clock, and they have arranged to seize Chambers and tie him up; or, if he resists, to knock him on the head directly they hear our whistle. Besides, there is no doubt the gold is stored in some secret vault. We might have a difficulty in finding it, and even if we do find it, we may have to use powder to blow it open.'

"'Why get twenty?' another asked, 'when we four and Muller would be enough. The fewer the better.'

"'No, Driscoll; we had better take a good force. I would rather take forty than twenty. A quarter of a million weighs a tremendous lot, I make it out roughly about two tons and a half. A man could not carry off more than fifty pounds weight—that is, he could not hide more than fifty pounds weight about him—so that it would take a hundred men to carry off that lot.'

"'Well, then, we must get some carts. There is John Blake, he has a cart, and picks up fares in the town, we could rely

upon him; and Pat Maloney, he lets his cart out. Between them they could bring in two tons easily enough; and then we could get two others—all boys we could trust. Then, if there were twenty of us, we could take fifty pounds apiece, as you say.'

"'Yes,' the other said doubtfully, 'but there would be a big row over it. It would be guessed that the job had been done to get at gold, and Kruger's people would consider that they had been robbed of their rights, and there would be a big search.'

"'They can only guess,' the Irishman replied; 'you may be sure we shall leave no one in the house to blab about it.'

"They talked for some time and went through a lot of names, and then agreed that they would only take a dozen altogether, as they were not sure that they could trust any of the others they had named. And they were of opinion that each of them could carry a hundredweight, and perhaps even a hundredweight and a half. 'A man can carry a mighty lot of gold,' one of them said, 'and it takes up such a little space that it would not make much of a lump.' It was agreed that on leaving the house they should separate, all going different ways, each choosing such hiding-place as he liked for his gold. Then they would meet at the houses of the two men who were to take the carts, and bury the gold they had carried off in the yards.

"That is about what I have heard, Master Yorke. There were bits that I did not hear, for sometimes they talked so low that I could not catch the words. Then they called the wine-shop keeper to pay for what they had had, and went out in a body. I didn't move for half an hour. I thought that perhaps one of them might be watching me from outside the window, and if I had woke up too soon, they might suspect that I had not been really asleep, in which case I should not have gone far before I got a knife between my shoulders. But luckily the landlord came in, and after speaking to me twice, seized me by the collar and shook me. 'Now,' he said, 'you can't be sleeping here any longer. Wake up! You have a shilling to pay for what you have drunk.'

"I pretended to fumble about for some time trying to find the money, and then stumbled out of the room. Then I came along in hopes of finding you or Peter to tell you about it."

"You have done quite right, Hans. We must join in the game. In the first place, we must find out where the place is. It is seven o'clock now, and there is no time to be lost. Peter, you had better go and get your rifle at once; hide it under your clothes if you can, for it will be daylight for another half-hour, and it would never do for you to walk through the streets with a rifle on your shoulder. Be as quick as you can and come back here. I will find out where the place is from the German at my hotel. You come back in half an hour, Hans; it will take Peter that time to get his rifle and return."

Then he walked back to his hotel, while the Kaffir went off at a run.

"Whereabout is the Parfontein mine? I forgot I had to go there to see how many cattle he will want next week."

"I thought that the mine was shut down," the German said.

"No, not altogether. At any rate, he wants some cattle. I forgot all about it until now. But if it is not too far I will walk over."

"It is about three miles."

"Then I had better take my horse."

"It is Chambers's house that you want, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, you cannot go very far wrong. Go out by the western road, and walk straight on about two miles. You will see a shaft and some tips half a mile away to the left. The house stands a quarter of a mile from there. You can hardly mistake it; it is a large house with a big garden round it. Chambers keeps it watered by a pipe from the engine that pumps the mine."

Hans was, as arranged, waiting a short distance away; it had been settled that he had better get a straw hat instead of the one he was wearing, and walk on alone for a bit.

"Go straight along the road to the west, Hans. I shall

overtake you before you reach the turning to the mine; and if I don't, wait where the road turns off to the left, two miles and a half away. The mine lies half a mile to the left. Of course, as you go along you will get your rifle and bandolier. You had better load them before you start. I don't think any of those fellows would know you again, for that hat quite changes your appearance. But I think it would be as well for you to go into the first store that is open, and buy a light-coloured coat. You would be quite safe from detection then. But if you should be attacked before I join you, you will, of course, shoot. Do you understand?"

"Quite."

Yorke went up to his room, slung his rifle and bandolier over his shoulder, and then went down and put the saddle on his horse. He would rather have walked, but he knew that no Boer would have dreamt of making a journey of three miles on foot, and to do so would have strongly excited suspicion in the mind of the German, that he was not what he said. He did not bring the horse out until Peter came up.

"Take the road to the west, Peter; you can't walk fast with that gun down your leg. I shall join you as soon as you are out of the town—you are not likely to meet anyone after that—and I will carry your rifle as well as mine. It would be more natural for me to have two guns than for you to have one—I might have left the second one in the town to be repaired the last time I was here, and be now taking it home."

Yorke waited ten minutes, and then took the horse out and mounted. It was now a quarter to eight, and there was no time to be lost. He overtook Peter half a mile outside the town, and the Kaffir at once handed him his rifle.

"Now, you must trot," he said, "or Hans will be there before us."

They went at a brisk trot, but did not overtake Hans on the road. They found him, however, sitting at the point where the other road turned off.

"Have you seen any of your friends, Hans?"

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"YOU ARE MY PRISONERS," YORKE SAID STERNLY

"No. At least, I did see two of them in the town, but they were talking together and did not notice me."

"Now I shall go up to the door and knock. Directly it is opened, I shall point my rifle at the man's head, and tell him he is a dead man if he utters a word. Then you will run in and bind him. I have brought the horses' picket ropes with me. You will take charge of him, Peter, while I go in with Hans. I don't want to alarm the family till I have got the other two fellows tied up. We will find out the way to the kitchen. There is no fear of their making any resistance when they see a couple of guns pointed at them. You will take charge of them, Hans, while I go in and explain matters to Mr. Chambers."

It was quite dark when they arrived at the house. Yorke dismounted at the gate, and told Peter to take the horse round to the other side of the house and fasten it up at some quiet spot, and then to rejoin him. On his return Hans and Peter took up their places one on each side of the door, and Yorke went up the steps and knocked. It was some little time before he was answered. He thought it likely that the men would be consulting together as to whether they would let the visitor in or not. At last the door opened.

"Mr. Chambers is not in," the man said. "Whatever your business, you must come to-morrow."

"My business will not wait," Yorke said, and raised the gun which he held in his hand.

The man started back.

"You are before your time," he said. "Nine o'clock is the hour."

"This is your hour and minute, for if you make the slightest sound I will put a bullet through your brain. Neither speak nor move."

The man stood paralysed, altogether unable to understand the situation.

"Come in," Yorke said to his followers. "Tie this man up, and if he opens his lips put a knife into him."

In a minute the fellow was laid on the ground, and securely tied hand and foot.

"Don't take your eye off him, Peter. Put your knife into him if he moves. Now then, Hans."

Yorke moved along the hall to a door standing open leading to the kitchen. There was a passage with an open door at the other end.

"Who is the visitor, Mike?" a man's voice asked as he came along, Hans treading lightly behind him. "Of course you sent him away?"

"Not exactly," Yorke replied, as he and Hans walked into the kitchen with their rifles ready for action.

A girl gave a slight scream of alarm, while the men leapt to their feet, and then stood immovable as the rifles were pointed at their heads.

"You are my prisoners," Yorke said sternly to them, "and if either of you moves, he is a dead man. Hans, take the fellow on the right; put your rifle by my side.

"Turn round," he said to the man, "and put your hands behind you."

The fellow did as he was told, and after both were securely tied up, Yorke said:

"Now, take your rifle again, Hans, and shoot either of them if they try to unloose their ropes.

"Do not be afraid," he went on to the girl; "we are friends of your master. Which room is he in?"

"The drawing-room, sir."

"Then show me into another room, and go in and tell him that an English gentleman wishes to speak to him."

The girl obeyed the order tremblingly. She thought that Yorke would treat her master as he had treated the two men, but she dared not disobey. The room was in darkness, and Yorke handed her a match-box, saying:

"Go and light the lamp or candles, whichever you have. I shall stand at the door while you deliver the message. Come out directly you have given it. I do not wish to alarm the ladies."

The terrified girl struck three or four matches before she could obtain a light. Then she went to a door opposite.

"An English gentleman wants to speak to you, sir."

"Show him into the dining-room."

Thinking it was one of the other Englishmen who had, like himself, stayed at the mines, Mr. Chambers came out. He started with a sudden exclamation as his eyes fell upon Peter, standing with a rifle in his hand by the side of his servant.

"If you will step inside, Mr. Chambers, I will explain matters," Yorke said, stepping forward. "There is no occasion for the slightest uneasiness, and I have taken the steps you see not to alarm the ladies of your family."

Mr. Chambers was still further surprised at this address by a stranger, who, in spite of his attire as a Dutch farmer, was evidently English.

"Who are you, sir," he asked, "and what is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct?"

"My name is Harberton. I am a lieutenant in the 9th Lancers, and was, when I was captured by the Boers, acting as one of General Pole-Carew's aides-de-camp. You have, no doubt, heard to-day of my escape last night from one of the prisons at Pretoria. I think that is sufficient introduction."

"Quite," Mr. Chambers said, holding out his hand and shaking that of Yorke; "I congratulate you on your escape. And now, will you explain to me why you have thus fallen upon my servant?"

He walked into the dining-room and shut the door.

"Before you answer my question, Mr. Harberton, I must ask if you are in need of refreshments?"

"Not at all, sir. I will now give you an account of this business."

And he related how Hans had overheard the plot to capture the treasure with the aid of Mr. Chambers's own servants, and how they were at that moment already gathering round the house.

"Fools!" Mr. Chambers said. "They would have, no

doubt, taken my life, and murdered my wife and daughters, but the gold they would never have got. I will explain that afterwards. You have indeed rendered me an inestimable service, and I thank you with all my heart, in my own name and in that of my family. So you have all these rascals of mine tied up safely?"

"I think so, sir; but it would be as well to see to them a little more closely, for I shall want my two men when these fellows arrive. In the first place, can they enter at any other point than at the front door?"

"No, I have iron shutters to all the windows. They are not closed at the present moment, for on such a hot evening one wants air. However, that will be the first step. I will turn this light out, and then we can shut the windows and close the shutters without being noticed outside. I will then go round with you to the other rooms and shut them up too, and bolt and bar the back-door, which is lined with iron. In the drawing-room, I will ask one of the girls to shut the windows and draw down the blinds—even if the scoundrels are watching, that will seem a natural act—I will then shut the shutters there, and tell the ladies that there is a little trouble ahead, but that they need not fear or be in the slightest way uneasy, as I have plenty of assistance, and can easily dispose of some ruffians who have an idea of breaking in; I had better request them to go upstairs until the matter is over."

In a quarter of an hour all the preparations were made. The three servants had been more carefully bound, and were beyond any possibility of loosing their ropes unless by very prolonged exertions. They had just finished all the preparations when a whistle was heard outside.

"That was the signal for us to be seized," Mr. Chambers said grimly. "I suppose they will give their accomplices five minutes to carry that out. How had we better post ourselves, Mr. Harberton?"

"I should say two in each doorway. We shall all have our rifles ready, and I would let them get well into the hall; then

we can step out when I say 'Now!' and let drive at them. Our three Mausers will give us fifteen shots, and you have one with your rifle and five with your revolver. As they will be taken wholly by surprise, it is hardly likely that they will be able to fire a single shot, and we ought to be able to account for almost all of them. I think we had better turn out the lights in the drawing-room and lower the lamp in the hall, so that they will have an indistinct view of me as I open the door."

This was done. Two minutes later there was a light tapping on the door outside. Yorke stepped forward, and opened it a short distance.

"Is it you?" he asked.

"Of course it is. Is it all right?"

"Yes, everything is ready for you," and he quickly stepped back until level with the others.

The door was thrown open, and a number of men poured in.

"Turn up the light!" one said with an oath. "What have you turned it down for? There, shut that door behind you; one of the women may have got a revolver, and we don't want the sound heard. Now, where are—"

"Here," Yorke replied.

He turned up the light, the other three instantly stepped out, and four rifles were fired almost simultaneously. Shrieks, oaths of fury, and heavy falls were heard as Yorke and his companions emptied the magazines of their rifles into the group, and the cracks of Mr. Chambers's revolver joined in the din. Not a shot was fired in return. When the last cartridge had been fired, most of the assailants lay dead in the hall; the men who had last entered, panic-stricken at the sudden outburst of fire, had tried to open the door they had just closed, but the backward rush of the others prevented them from doing so, and it was not until ten had fallen that the other two were able to open the door and fly. Hastily recharging the magazines, Yorke and his two followers ran out, but a moment later they heard the sounds of galloping horses and

cracking whips, and knew that pursuit would be futile. However, as they had the names of the owners of the carts, this mattered little, and they returned to the house. Mr. Chambers had at once gone upstairs to assure the ladies that the affair was over, and that none of those in the house had been hurt.

Examining the bodies, they found that most of them had two bullet-wounds and some three, the Mauser bullets having at that short range passed through two or even more bodies. Several were hit in the head, but most of them in the chest.

"That is just as well," Yorke said, when he had ascertained that none of them were breathing. "It will save all further trouble."

At this moment there was a sound of steps outside, and a loud, continuous knocking at the door. Mr. Chambers threw open the window upstairs.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We have just run down from the mine, sir; we heard the sound of firing here."

"Thank you, lads! it is all over now, but you may be of use," and he ran down and opened the door.

Six men were there all armed with guns.

"You see there has been a hard fight here, lads," he said, as an exclamation of surprise broke from the men at the scene in the hall. "Fortunately I had been warned just in time, and with the aid of this gentleman and his friends have, as you see, killed ten of them; only two got away. Now, I do not want any talk about it. Lend a hand, will you, to get the bodies outside; then I want a hole dug deep enough to hold them. Put it a hundred yards away from the house. It will be a heavy job, but I will put that right with you on Saturday."

"Shall we get the other five men up from below, sir?"

"No; I don't want the matter talked about, and the fewer that know of it the less chance there is of its getting about. I trust that you will all keep a silent tongue about the affair."

"You can trust us for that, sir. None of you are hurt, I hope?"

"Not in the slightest. There was not a shot fired on their side, we took them completely by surprise."

"I should say, sir, the best place to bury them would be to make a hole in the foot of one of the pit-heaps, then we can shovel the loose stuff down from above. It would be a much shorter job than digging a hole, and there is no chance of their ever being disturbed there."

"A very good plan, Simmonds. It will be an unpleasant job anyhow. Wait a minute."

On going to the dining-room he returned with two bottles of whisky. Hans and Peter assisted in carrying the bodies outside, and then offered to bring pails of water and remove the blood-stains in the hall, and after that to assist in carrying the bodies away.

By this time the servant had come down and relighted the lamps in the drawing-room, and Yorke and Mr. Chambers went in there.

"I wonder, sir," Yorke said, "that you were not afraid to keep so large a sum in your house."

"I do not generally do so. As the gold is melted down, it is brought here for safety, and once a week it is sent to the bank, so that the amount seldom exceeds two thousand ounces. But this time it has been altogether different. When I saw that Kruger was bent upon war, I put all hands on to get the richest stuff in our reserves. The consequence was that the weekly output was five times as large as usual. I sent the ordinary amount to the bank, keeping the other by me, and intended to send it all down at once by rail in boxes with false marks on them, or if I could not do that, to keep it here till the war was over. Kruger's sudden ultimatum took me, as well as everyone else, by surprise. I was certain then that I could not get it down, and that if I sent it to the bank, Kruger and his people would lay hands upon it, as, in fact, they did with what I had sent in.

"It was only a few of the officials in the smelting-room who had any idea of the output, and even these could hardly have

told what amount I sent into the bank. It is clear, however, that one of them must have carelessly mentioned it, and that these fellows who made this attack must have discovered, perhaps from my servants who used to help to load the van, or from one of the guards who had accompanied it to unload it at the bank, that as the amount sent in was about the same as usual, there must remain a very large sum indeed hidden. I had really very little fear of the house being broken into, but in order to prevent any suspicion of there being money here, I discharged the men who always kept watch round the house at night at the same time that I paid off all the other hands, except the engineers who kept the pumping-engine at work to keep down the water in the mines. Then I relied upon the fact that burglars getting into the house would have difficulty in finding the safe, and still more difficulty in opening it.

"I had no doubt as to the honesty of my servants, who alone knew its position; but they did not know the manner in which it was protected. It is situated under my study, which is at the back of this room. The safe is an extremely strong one, of alternate sheets of steel and iron, and was made specially for me. It opens at the top, and you get at it by taking up the carpet in the study and lifting a trap-door. The vault in which the safe stands is two feet each way wider than the safe, and as this stands in the centre, there is a foot of vacant space on each side of it. Round the upper part of the safe there is a sliding apparatus by which a stout steel case, like a bottomless box, can be drawn up to the level of the trap-door. This, however, is only done when the safe is to be opened.

"In the next place, I have a communication from what I may call the strong-room both with the pipe which brings water for the garden and with a large cistern upstairs. Thus, the strong-room is kept filled with water, and the safe is therefore surrounded above as well as on its four sides with water. When I want to open the safe, I go into the study by myself, lift the

heavy trap-door, which is cased with an inch of steel, but is easily moved by means of a counterpoise, and then, with the aid of a lever in a secret closet, push up this box until it is level with the floor. I may say that the safe is three inches wider each way than the trap-door. The door of the safe itself, being one inch narrower each way than the trap-door, opens through it.

"Having got this box, which is perfectly water-tight, into its place, I work another handle in a secret cupboard and pump out the water in the frame above the safe, and then open the door of the safe, and it is now ready for the men to come in and store the gold away. When they have left I close the door of the safe, lower the frame to its place, and the safe is at once covered with a foot of water. Thus, you see, burglars would have a succession of difficulties. They would, in the first place, be obliged to cut through the steel of the trap-door, then they would find, to their surprise, water immediately underneath them, and until this was removed it would be impossible for them to blow in the door of the safe. They would naturally try to bucket it out, but as it would come in again as fast as they did so, they would gain nothing by it. They might try to blow in the safe with waterproof cartridges, but I doubt whether they would succeed.

"The lid is of immense strength. If they did succeed in bursting it there is another equally strong a foot lower, and this also would have to be destroyed. Even then the holes made would not be sufficient to let them through, and the only way they could possibly get the gold out would be to try and fish out the boxes with a hook at the end of a pole—again an almost impossible task, as the boxes are square, very heavy, and packed tightly together, so that there would be nothing to get hold of. I may say that I got the idea from reading, in the time of the Commune of Paris, how the bank was able to protect the specie in its vaults by filling them with water from the mains. I worked out the details myself, and I think I improved on the original, though that was good

enough—for it baffled all the efforts of the mechanics and engineers of the Commune to get at the money."

"That is a splendid plan certainly, sir," Yorke said.

"Yes, but though it would have saved the gold, it would not have saved our lives; and had I thought that the amount there is in the safe was known to anyone now in Johannesburg, I think I should have shut up the house and moved to the one I have in the town, contenting myself with keeping a couple of watchmen in this house, and seeing that all was right every day when I came to see that the men at the pumping-engine were doing their duty. That is what I shall most likely do now. Not that I think there is any probability of a renewal of the attempt; the lesson has been altogether too severe."

"What do you mean to do, sir, with your three rascals?"

"I shall go to-morrow to the head of the police and tell him that they have tried to rob the house, and ask him to send down half a dozen men to take them by the next train to Komati Poort. I could do nothing with them here, for your man Hans is the only witness against them, and he could not, of course, appear. Fortunately they do not know that, and I shall tell them that if I were to hand them over to the police and charge them with this crime they would certainly be hanged. However, I am willing to allow for the temptation they had, and shall only charge them with dishonesty, and have them then sent out of the Transvaal. As no doubt at present they expect nothing short of hanging, they will be glad enough to be let off so lightly."

"They certainly ought to be," Yorke said warmly, "for they are a great deal worse than the others. Whatever discharged men and the ruffians of the town might have done, your servants, who I have no doubt were well treated by you, ought to have been faithful."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Harberton; but you see that it is of the greatest importance to me not to have the matter talked about. If there were an enquiry, it would of course

come out that there is a large sum of money in the house, and you may be quite sure that Kruger would commandeer it. As it is, a bribe of a couple of hundred pounds to the head of the police will ensure these fellows being sent out of the country without an opportunity being given them of saying a word to anyone. And you may be sure I shall impress upon them that if they ever set foot in the Transvaal again I will have them arrested at once on this charge. In that way I have every hope that the affair will be kept altogether dark. You don't know, of course, whether the two men who brought the carts were included in the twelve?"

"I do not, sir, but I should think it very likely; they did not want to have to divide the spoil into more portions than necessary. I should think it most probable that they left their carts outside and came in with the others. Whether they were among those who were killed or not, of course I cannot say."

"Yes, I should think they would be sure to come in with the others," Mr. Chambers said; "and in that case there are only two men who know anything about this matter, and you may be sure that they will keep their mouths closed. Well, we have talked more than enough of my affairs. Now about yourself. If you and your two followers like to stay here, I think you might certainly do so with safety. I need not say how heartily welcome you would be."

"Thank you, sir! But though I will gladly stay till morning, I must then be off. I am anxious to get back as quickly as possible to rejoin Lord Methuen's force. I have now been nearly a month away. Then, too, I must put in an appearance at the hotel where I have been staying, for I was obliged to enquire the way to your house. The landlord will be expecting me back to-night, and I shall have to make some excuse for my absence. And if I do not appear in the morning, he might suspect that something was wrong, and give information, with a description of my appearance, to the authorities."

"That I could arrange," Mr. Chambers said. "I could

look in there myself in the morning, and say that as it was so late and the night dark I had asked you to stay at my house till morning, and that you had gone off without returning to the town. Ah, here are my wife and daughters!"

CHAPTER XV

DOWN COUNTRY

"THIS is Mr. Harberton, to whom we all owe our lives," Mr. Chambers said as his wife, followed by her two daughters, girls of sixteen and eighteen, entered the room.

"I do not know how to thank you, sir," Mrs. Chambers said as she shook hands with Yorke, "for assuredly we should all have been murdered had it not been for your warning and assistance."

"It is rather to my man than to myself you are indebted, Mrs. Chambers, for it is he who overheard the conversation this afternoon at which the affair was finally arranged. He showed greater sharpness than I should have given him credit for. As an ordinary thing he would merely have taken a glass of liquor and left the place; but the fact that the men in the saloon stopped speaking when he went in, and asked him whether he spoke English, and were not satisfied that he could not, but went into another room to talk, excited his curiosity, and, sitting with his ear against the partition, he was able to make out what they were saying."

"That was very sharp of him," Mrs. Chambers said; "but it is pretty certain he would have taken no steps in the matter had it not been for your leading, especially as he was himself, as I understand from my husband, instrumental in aiding your escape from prison, and so dared not attract attention.

"Do not, I beg of you, try to minimize the service you have rendered us, for you certainly will not lessen the obliga-

tion that we are under to you. I shudder to think of the great danger we have escaped. I know it is not likely that another attack will be made yet, but I shall never feel comfortable here after this, and my husband has promised to take us in to our town house to-morrow morning, to stop till the war is over. We hope you will go with us."

"Mr. Harberton says that he must be off at once, my dear. He wants to get back to the fighting again."

"I am sorry indeed for that. It seems unnatural, after what he has done for us, that we should let him go away so soon. Now, do tell us something about yourself—but first, where have you put those men, John?"

"One is locked up in the cellar, another in the stables, and the third in the wood-house, so that they cannot aid each other to get away."

"At any rate," she went on, "none of us will feel inclined for much sleep to-night; and we want to know all about Mr. Harberton and how his Dutch servant came to be at Pretoria, and all about what he has been doing since he landed, and the truth about the battles that have been fought. But before he begins, will you go into the kitchen, girls, and help Jane get some tea in the dining-room, with whatever there is in the house. It will do us all good, and we won't ask Mr. Harberton to tell his story till we have had what we may call supper."

"While they are away," Mr. Chambers said, "I may as well ask you as to whether you have any plans for getting down to the Modder?"

"No, I have no distinct plans, except that, as you see, I am dressed as a young Boer farmer, and as I talk the language sufficiently to pass muster, I can support the character well enough."

"But how is it that you talk Dutch, or rather I suppose I should say Taal, Mr. Harberton?"

"That I will tell you presently," Yorke laughed, "or I shall have to go over the same thing twice. My man Hans is my

regimental servant, and has learnt to speak English very fairly, and of course knows Dutch. My Kaffir speaks Dutch and a little English, and as I speak a little Kaffir we get on very well together. He has just put up my horse in your stable. I had no time to lose when I first came here, and fastened him up behind the house, where he was not likely to be observed if any of those fellows went round there. As for getting to the Modder, it appeared to me that as a Dutch farmer, with one of his farm hands and a Kaffir labourer, I might get through without exciting much suspicion."

"You might, and you might not," Mr. Chambers said. "You see, almost all the able-bodied men are away with the commandos, and you would be likely to be closely questioned as to why you were not in the field. If you were going the other way it would be more easy, for you might then say that you were coming from Cape Colony, as thousands of others have done, to join the Boers. But even in that case it would seem strange that you were going away from the fighting instead of joining a commando at once; but it would be still more strange that you should have come up to Johannesburg. What did you say at the inn? what excuse did you make for enquiring where I lived?"

"I pretended that my people had all gone on commando, leaving me to look after the farm, and that I was going over to see you about some cattle that you wanted for the men still working on the mine. The man was a German, and did not, I think, see anything unlikely in my story."

"Yes, but though that might do very well here, it would hardly do elsewhere. Besides, these Boers are all related or connected with each other, and, ignorant as they are on other matters, can give the name of almost every family within fifty or sixty miles of where they live, and know more or less the name of every farmer in the Transvaal. The landdrosts of all the towns will have been warned to look out for a young English officer and a young Dutchman, who will no doubt be making for the frontier, and two of you at least answer to

the personal description; your dress would not go for much, as they would be sure that the man who aided your escape would also procure a disguise for you. However, we must put our heads together to-morrow and see if we can hit on some plan."

After the meal was finished, Mr. Chambers asked Yorke to tell them something about himself and what he had seen of the war.

"It is of yourself that we principally want to know," he said. "After the services you have rendered us, we should like to know as much as possible about you and your people at home, and in fact anything that you may choose to tell us, especially as to your prospects in the future. The longer you make your story, the better we shall be pleased. Certainly I shall not go to bed to-night, and I don't think either my wife or daughters will be anxious to do so for some time."

There was a general murmur of agreement.

Yorke accordingly told of his life at home, the reason why he had come out, how he had learnt Dutch and a little Kaffir on his cousin's farm, how his resolve to enlist in the war had been quickened by the quarrel with Dirck Jansen, and how, after scouting for a short time with twenty Kaffirs under his command, he had witnessed the four battles, and had gained a commission in the Lancers by carrying a message into Kimberley and back to the Modder. Then he told of his capture, how Hans had, with the Kaffir, journeyed up to Pretoria to rescue him, and how they had finally succeeded.

"Well, you have certainly managed to crowd a great deal of adventure into little more than a year, Mr. Harberton, and have done well all through, and deserved the commission you have won. So you say you saw Rhodes in Kimberley? Did you have much talk with him?"

"Yes, sir, he asked me a great many questions, and I told him, though not so fully, what I have told you. He asked if I intended to stop in the army after the war was over. I said that I had no idea of doing so, as I had come out with the

intention of making money. He was good enough to speak flatteringly of my having learned to speak Dutch so soon, and said that if, when things were settled, I would go to him, he would find a berth for me and push me forward."

"You could not have a better patron. He is the biggest man out here by far, and is virtually king of Rhodesia. But you will please remember that I must have some say in the matter, and a very considerable one. None of us four would be alive now had it not been for you. And though I don't think those scoundrels would have got at the gold, they might have done so, for they would have had plenty of time; as, if any of the engineers had wanted to know anything, one of my servants would only have had to say that I was ill, or away for a few days, and before a week they might very well have found out how the strong-room was filled with water, cut off the supply, and then emptied it out far enough to allow them to work at the safe. I cannot assert that the gold is absolutely safe yet; there is no saying what may happen before the troops arrive here. The greed of Kruger and his gang is insatiable, and they may search every house belonging to the bank managers from top to bottom, and demand to inspect the safes."

"Why not bury some of it, sir, in one of the mine tips, just as they have hidden the bodies?"

"Because, although I have every reason to believe that the twelve white men who are still at work are all honest fellows, there is a point at which temptation may be too great, and I might find, when I came to examine the horde, that it was all gone. They are not aware of the existence of my store here, and it is well they should not be. One has heard before now of ships laden with treasure being seized by their crews, who, until the temptation came in their way, may have been all honest fellows. No, I will take the chances. I shall tell the two head engineers to come down and take up their quarters here, and bring two good men out of each shift with them. In that way there will always be three men in the house. As

for the police here, they are, as a whole, the biggest rogues in the place. I would rather shut up the house and leave it empty than have any of them here. Now, it is two o'clock, and, if we cannot sleep, I have no doubt you can. I will show you up to a bedroom. I had a mattress taken down to the kitchen, where you told me your men would keep watch by turns. The girls both look half-asleep, and you and I will wheel the two sofas up near the fire, and bring the one in the dining-room here for my wife. I dare say I shall get a nap in the arm-chair presently. We will say nine o'clock breakfast."

"Very well, sir, I will be here by that time. I shall ride over to the town early, pay my visit to the hotel, and then be back again to breakfast."

The events of the evening did not keep Yorke awake long. "I do think I am the luckiest fellow going," he said to himself as he turned into bed. "In the first place, I get a commission in the army; in the second, I obtain Mr. Rhodes's good-will; and now Mr. Chambers, one of the richest men in Johannesburg, is going to take me up, and all from a series of accidents. It began, certainly, by my learning Dutch, which enabled me to get through to Kimberley and get a commission, thanks to the accident of Peter getting away and sticking to me. Then there was my being captured. That did not seem a piece of good fortune, but, thanks to Hans's sharpness, it has turned out the best piece of luck of all, if I can but get safely back to the Modder. There is an old saying that luck is better than riches. I did not believe this formerly, but it has turned out so in my case. Had not my father lost his money I should be grinding away at Rugby, and should have thought myself lucky four or five years hence to get a curacy of one hundred and twenty pounds a year."

Yorke was up at seven, and started at once on horseback for the town, taking Peter with him, but leaving Hans behind in charge of the prisoners.

"Where have you been all night?" the innkeeper asked.

"I could not get to see Mr. Chambers till late, and after we

had made our bargain, he gave me some supper, and then said I might as well stop there for the night. He put a mattress down by the kitchen fire, and I slept as well as I should have done here. I am off now, so if you will give me my bill I will pay it."

"Will you want breakfast?"

"No, I shall be off at once; last night's supper will do till I get back."

"Then, here is your bill," the German said, taking a piece of paper from his pocket. "I made it out last night, thinking you might be starting early. There it is; I added it up, you see, and should have put on the cost of breakfast had you taken it."

Yorke paid the bill without question, though it was as large as it would have been had he stopped at a first-class hotel in London. Then he rode back again to the mine.

"I have been thinking over matters," Mr. Chambers said, as they were sitting down to breakfast, "and it seems to me that, to begin with, you would travel more satisfactorily and more safely in a Cape cart than you would on horseback. I have got one that is used for sending messages into the town and fetching things out. It has been a good cart in its time, and is so still, except that it wants repainting and so on. I can let you have a horse to go with yours; it is a good serviceable animal. I should be delighted to give you a pair of my own, but they would be sure to attract attention, for I rather pride myself on my stud. I have got double harness for the cart, though when I go longer journeys I follow the Boer fashion and drive four horses."

"My own horse is used to being driven; my cousin generally had it out when he went in to Richmond. I am very much obliged to you for your offer. We should certainly attract less attention in a cart than if we all rode. I shall myself drive, as I enjoy it. I know that as a rule the Boers generally let the Kaffirs drive, and I should be content to do so myself; but a good many Boers do drive."

"There will be nothing unusual in that; indeed, about here most of the Boers drive, as they see the Uitlanders do it. I will put another saddle in the cart, for when you get near the frontier you will certainly find it easier to get through on horseback.

"I should advise you to take the direct road south to Bloemfontein. I have a friend there; he is a Dutchman, but a thorough believer in English rule, though, of course, at present he has to keep his opinions to himself. He broke his leg some years ago and has been lame ever since, and so has escaped being obliged to go on commando. I will write a letter to him after breakfast strongly recommending you to him. I shall not say who you are, or that you are an Englishman, because it is just possible that you may be searched. Anyway, it will be as well for you to conceal the letter in your clothes. I will write a second letter to him, saying that you have been employed at this mine, which is correct enough, and that, as I have no further occasion for your work, you are now going down to take your share in the fighting. I will also get you a pass from the head of the police, whom, as you know, I am going over to interview directly after breakfast with reference to our prisoners. I will get it made out in the name of Gert Meyring, of the Orange Free State. It is natural enough that you should be taking down with you a young Dutchman who has also been employed at the mine, and who is going with you to the front, and that you should have a Kaffir with you also. The only fear is that your description might tally so closely with the warning that has been sent, that you may be suspected."

"I can get over that, sir; I had a wig made for me to wear as a disguise, if necessary. It is sewn up in the lining of this coat, and being so soft it altogether escaped attention when I was first searched. I am sure to have been described as having closely-cropped hair, whereas the wig comes down to my shoulders and entirely alters my appearance. I have never worn it yet, as I went into Kimberley, as I told you, in uniform, and in fact up till now have never given the thing

a thought from the day when I sewed it up. That, and darkening my eyebrows to match, would so alter my appearance that I do not think that even those who know me well would recognize me."

"That is capital; I have been worrying over the point all morning. I wish we had one for your man too, for I know he also was described in the telegram yesterday as having closely-cropped hair."

"I extemporized a wig for myself once before, sir, and can do one for Hans, if you will allow me to cut some hair from two of your horses' tails."

"Certainly you can do that. Is there anything else you will want?"

"A needle and thread, sir, and if you have such a thing as a glue-pot in the house it will be all the better."

"Yes, I think I have one somewhere, I daresay the girl can tell you where it is."

"We will do any sewing that is necessary, Mr. Harberton," the elder of the two girls said. "I am afraid that we are useless in most respects, but at least we can both sew."

Mr. Chambers went out with Yorke to the stables and showed him the horses that he was willing to have despoiled of a portion of their tails, and this, with a pair of scissors that the girls had lent him, Yorke speedily accomplished. They then saddled Mr. Chambers's favourite horse, and he at once started. He was away an hour and a half, by which time, amid a good deal of laughter and merriment, the hair had been sewn and glued into Hans's straw hat. Yorke had also got out his wig and put it on, and even Mrs. Chambers, shaken as she still was by the incidents of the night before, joined in her daughters' hearty laughter at the changed appearance of her two guests.

"The police will be here at twelve, Mr. Harberton, therefore, if you have now made up your mind to start to-day, it would be as well that you should be away before they arrive. You know I should be delighted if you would stop a few days,

but as you said that you would very much rather be off this morning, I shall not try to persuade you to do so."

Half an hour later all was ready for the start. Mr. Chambers had taken Hans aside. "You have done me a great service," he said. "The present is not a time when it is safe to be travelling about with much money in your possession, especially when you are wanted by the authorities, and if you were searched, and found to have a sum of money that did not accord with your apparent position, you would not only lose the money, but your liberty as well. Therefore, I do not propose to make you a gift at the present time, but I engage myself to pay to you the sum of five hundred pounds whenever you may wish to buy a farm or otherwise settle down after the conclusion of the war."

Hans's eyes opened with surprise. "I only did what my master told me, sir."

"You did more. Your astuteness in listening to the conversation of the rascals who were talking in that drinking-shop was no doubt at first a mere matter of curiosity, but the fact that you communicated it at once to Mr. Harberton enabled him to take the steps which defeated the plot; and you bore your share in the fight itself. My name is well known, I think, throughout South Africa, and, as I may be away from the country when you wish to draw the money, here is a promissory note, undated, undertaking to pay three months after presentation the sum of five hundred pounds on the duly certified signature of Hans Bernard; and with it is this letter, saying that I have handed you this bill in consideration of the very great service that you rendered me in discovering and thwarting an attempt on my life. That letter can do you no harm if found upon you. When the war is over you can, at any time, hand that note to the bank here, or to any of its branches in Natal, or to its agents. They will require the signature of Mr. Harberton, or some other person known to them, and will then place the money at your disposal as soon as they have communicated with the bank here."

Without waiting for any thanks from Hans, who was too overwhelmed to find words for the purpose, he went across to the stables, where Peter was harnessing the horses. "Peter," he said, "your master tells me that you have been very faithful to him, and you have now rendered me a service by helping him to defeat the men who attacked this place last night. It would not be safe to give you money now, as you may be searched going down country, but I shall give him authority to pay you two hundred pounds for me at the end of the war. Don't spend it in folly at the Cape; go back to your own people, build a kraal, buy cattle, and settle down there."

Then he walked away, and in a few words told Yorke what he had done. "They have both proved themselves good men by their devotion to you," he said, "it will give them both a good start in life."

"Thank you most heartily, Mr. Chambers, I am certain that both of them will do justice to your kindness. I am sure of Hans being steady; and, as I have already persuaded the Kaffir to swear off liquor, he will, I feel certain, take your advice, which is indeed almost the same as I gave him when getting him to promise not to spend his earnings in drink. These native labourers with the army are all paid very high, indeed ridiculously high wages. He has promised to hand over his pay, when he gets it, to me, and I have undertaken if he does so to keep him in tobacco, so he will, if the war lasts for a year, have over fifty pounds laid by, which will add to his sense of responsibility. I will not draw upon you for the money until he is ready to go straight away directly he gets it. Of course, I do not know what I shall be doing myself; if I can, I shall certainly accompany him and see him settled. As to Hans, I have no fear as to his doing well; he certainly was not a hard worker until I went to my cousin's farm, but since then he has quite woke up. He saw the advantage of irrigation there, and I shall strongly advise him not to go in for keeping cattle, but to take a small piece of good land near this town, or

Kimberley, where water can be obtained at no great depth, and to go in for growing vegetables for sale in the town. I am convinced that it would pay splendidly."

"He certainly could not do better. The prices of vegetables are extravagantly high, and he can dispose of any quantity at rates that would pay him well. Well, there is the Kaffir with the cart. You had better come in and say good-bye to my wife and daughters."

Five minutes later they started, with strongly-expressed hopes that in two or three months they might meet again when the British army came up.

"You are sure to find me here," Mr. Chambers said, "unless, when it is found you are approaching, the Boers get mad and order all Uitlanders away. However, even then I fancy that the usual bribe will avail to purchase me an exemption, but if I do have to go I shall come back again directly you capture the place."

A basket containing wine, a ham, and a variety of eatables had been placed under the seat.

"What shall I do with the trap and horse, sir?"

"You can either sell the trap for what it will fetch and keep the horse, or, in fact, do as you like with it. Good-bye! and take care of yourself. Which he won't do," Mr. Chambers added as, with a wave of the hand, Yorke drove off.

With two good horses and a light load they drove rapidly along. Mr. Chambers had, before he started, asked Yorke whether he had ample funds for the journey, and the latter was glad to be able to say that Hans had, before leaving the camp, drawn sufficient from the paymaster for anything that could be required.

"Whatever you do, Hans, keep your hat on. There is no fear of anyone who saw you in the prison recognizing you as you are; but if your hat should blow off, and anyone happened to be looking on at the time, the game would be up."

"I don't think it could blow off, master. The hair and

the glue under the lining have made it so much smaller that I had to press it quite hard to get it on my head."

"Well, when we are once clear away from the town, you can lift it a bit, for if it blows off then it will not matter.

"It is two hundred and fifty miles to Bloemfontein. I suppose it will take us about a week. We shall see how the horses stand it, they both start fresh. I was looking at the map this morning, and it is evident that there is no good road by the direct line, I mean the route followed by the railway. So I am taking the main road that goes down through Potchefstroom. There is no place of any size before that. It is about sixty miles. We will camp out to-night ten miles before we get there. Then we can drive through the town without stopping, and get on as far as Reitzburg. We can settle to-morrow whether we will put up at the town, or camp just across the Vaal, about a mile this side of the place. From there it is a little over forty miles to Kroonstad.

"I think when we get as far as that, we shall be beyond the farthest points where there will be danger. They will be looking for us chiefly on the road to Mafeking, which is, of course, the nearest point to the border; or else on that leading through Komati Poort, down to Delagoa Bay; and they will also, no doubt, search every train going south. In any case, they can have no idea that we are travelling by road at this pace, and if we were on foot we could not arrive at Kroonstad within two or three days of the time we shall get there. Besides, we have got the police pass; and certainly the description telegraphed on will in no way tally with our present appearance. So I do not think we shall be troubled, though it is as well to take every precaution."

They experienced, indeed, no difficulties whatever, and camped that night by a dam half a mile off the road, five miles out of Potchefstroom. As they had several water-bottles hung under the cart, and a bag of mealies, the horses fared as well as their masters. One of the first questions that Hans

had asked after they started was, whether Mr. Chambers had actually promised him five hundred pounds.

"It seems impossible," he said, "but that is what I understood him to say."

"That is what he intends to give you, Hans."

"But it is too much; only for sitting and listening for half an hour, and firing five shots with a rifle."

"That is all that it was to you, Hans, but to him it meant saving his life, and the lives of the ladies of his family. As to the gold, he told me how it was concealed, and that the robbers could never have got at it. Still, he values his life and those of the ladies at a large sum; and as he is a very rich man, he does not think it out of the way to make you a handsome present. I told him that I should advise you to carry out what we were saying the other day would be the best-paying thing for a man of small capital—to buy a piece of land near Johannesburg or Kimberley, to sink a deep well, and to put up horse-gear and irrigate the land; and to employ half a dozen Kaffirs to grow vegetables and plant fruit-trees, just as my cousin did. Only, you would do a great deal better than Mr. Allnutt, because the Boer farmers would not pay much for their vegetables or fruit, while you would get splendid prices in either of these towns. The vegetables would begin to pay three months after you started, but of course you would have to wait a couple of years before you got any return for the fruit-trees."

Hans was silent for three or four minutes, lost in the contemplation of himself as the owner of such a place.

"We shall have plenty of time to talk it over before then, Hans," Yorke went on, after a long pause, "but I should advise you not to spend any money on building a house for yourself at first—any sort of a hut will do; and though five hundred pounds seems a very large sum to you, you will want it all for your work; the well and horse-gear will cost a good bit. Then you will have your water-courses to make, and your ground to irrigate, say five acres to begin with; and it is always a good

plan to keep some money in hand in case of accidents, such as your well failing and your having to go deeper, or of your Kaffirs running away. Besides, you must have a horse and cart to take your goods to market. At any rate, Hans, if you want to get on you will have to bestir yourself. You know that young English gentlemen who come out don't think themselves above taking off their coats and working, and at first you will have to do the same. After a bit you will, as you extend your cultivated ground and carry the work farther, take on more Kaffirs, and you will have to see that they do their work. That was how Mr. Allnutt did, and it is only in that way that you will get work out of them."

"It will be grand," Hans murmured; "but," he broke off suddenly, "you will not be with me, Master Yorke, and I had hoped that, whatever you were doing, you would always keep me with you."

"So I should like to do, Hans, but it would not be good for you; it is always better that a man should depend upon himself, and not upon another. Some day you will want to marry, and then you will see how much better it is to have a nice home and a business than to be merely working for wages. It was just the same way with myself. I did not like leaving my father and mother, and going to start in a strange country. But I hoped that I might some day make a home for myself here, and do well; whereas, I had no chance of earning much in England."

"Well, Master Yorke, it was a lucky day for me when you came to Mr. Allnutt's, and took me to go out riding and shooting with you."

"It has turned out quite as fortunate for me, Hans."

Peter, who was not given to speaking unless addressed, said but little. Occasionally, as he looked at Yorke and Hans, he shook with silent laughter at their changed appearance, and indeed the transformation effected by their long hair was striking to one accustomed to their closely-cropped heads. By the way, however, he went about his work—taking the

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"ONE OF THE BOERS THEY HAD SPOKEN TO SAUNTERED IN"

horses out of the cart, supplying them with their water and grain, and rubbing them down—it was evident that he already, in imagination, considered himself to be a far more important person than he was before, and that he was preparing himself for the change from the humble position of a casual labourer in some small town to that of a man of position and influence among his tribe. Occasionally he would break into bursts of apparently unprovoked laughter, as if the change appeared to himself ludicrous in the extreme.

They were on the move at the first sign of daylight, and Potchefstroom was still asleep when they drove through. At eight o'clock they crossed the Vaal and drove into Reitzburg. A couple of Boers came up and asked them where they came from, but were quite satisfied with the answer, "From Potchefstroom," as they considered that if they had been allowed to pass through there, their journey must be a legitimate one.

"We have a pass from the chief of the police at Johannesburg, if you would like to see it."

"No," one of the men replied. "If it is good enough for them in the Transvaal, it is good enough for us. I suppose you are going down to the army?"

"Yes, we want to do our share of the fighting."

"Quite right! You must lose no time or you will be too late."

"So I suppose, by all they say," Yorke replied.

They thought it as well to wait for an hour to feed the horses and take a meal. Leaving Peter to look after the horses, and see that nobody touched the guns and other articles in the cart, they went into a small inn. While they were eating their meal one of the Boers they had spoken to sauntered in.

"Was there any news at Johannesburg?"

"No, nothing particular. Things are very quiet there."

"You did not hear, did you, of any escaped prisoners being caught?"

"We did hear that one of the English officers had got away from the jail."

"Yes, that is what I mean. They telegraphed to us here from Pretoria; but of course he would never come down this way. Still, we had to obey orders and keep a sharp look-out. If he had come this way he would have been caught. I expect, however, he went east; but he could not get far. They say he was quite a young chap, with close-cropped hair."

"Well, their young officers cannot have learned to talk Dutch, so there ought to be no difficulty in catching him," Yorke said.

"But he has got a Dutchman with him, and I suppose he himself won't open his lips, but the Dutchman will do his talking for him."

"Hans, you had better say something," Yorke laughed, "or possibly you may be taken for this British officer."

"I don't look much like a British officer with a cropped head," Hans said, "and I talk my own language better than I do English by a long way."

"Oh! I knew you could not be the man," the Boer said. "Still, I am glad to see that you are Dutch as well as your master. There might be questions asked, and now I can swear that you are both Africanders. It will satisfy anyone questioning me as to who has been along. I don't see myself what occasion there is for making a fuss about one officer getting away when we shall soon have all their army prisoners. It gives everyone a lot of trouble."

"Will you have a glass of spirits?" Yorke asked.

As it was with the hope of obtaining an invitation that the Boer had come in, he assented willingly, and remained talking until Yorke said it was time for them to be going on. They slept that night at Winkel Drift, on the Rhenoster River, and drove next day to Kroonstad. Here no questions were asked. They put up at an inn, and Yorke mentioned casually that they were intending to stay with a friend for a day or two at Bloemfontein, and then going to the front. They had avoided entering the town until it was dusk; and as many Boers were constantly passing down to join the commandos,

no one thought of enquiring minutely into their affairs. Three more days took them to Bloemfontein. There Yorke noticed, as they drove in, that many stores with British names over them were still open, for the wholesale expulsion of English from the Transvaal had not extended to the Orange Free State, where, till the outbreak of the war, a good feeling had existed between the two peoples. At Bloemfontein especially a considerable portion of the trading class had been British, and these, considering that, if they left, their stores would probably be looted, thought it better to remain, and, although their position was not a pleasant one, they had received fair treatment at the hands of the Boers.

CHAPTER XVI

AN OLD ENEMY

ARRIVING at Bloemfontein in the evening, they first went to an hotel, and having engaged rooms, and seen their horses put up, Yorke proceeded to the house of the Dutch gentleman to whom the letters Mr. Chambers had given him were addressed. On sending one in he was shown into the sitting-room, where Mr. von Rensburg presently joined him.

"You are the bearer of this letter, Mr. Meyring, from my friend, Mr. Chambers?"

"Yes, sir, and of this also, which I did not care to give into any hands but your own."

Mr. von Rensburg took it, a little surprised. The first had been so simple and matter-of-fact that he had not suspected for a moment that Yorke was not, as it stated, an employé at the mine. He looked scrutinizingly at Yorke when he had read the second letter.

"I will not ask who you are, Mr. Meyring, or whether that is your real name. It is just as well not to know more than

I can help. I understand you want to cross into Cape Colony, and may be glad of my advice as to the best road to take. In the first place, may I ask how you came here—by rail?"

"No, sir, we drove. I have a friend with me, and it is open to us either to drive from this point, or, as we have two horses, to ride, or to go on foot, though naturally we would rather not adopt the last plan if it could be helped."

"That I can well understand," the other said with a smile; "and indeed it would be the worst method; it would be far more natural for you to be driving or riding than going on foot. Now, tell me exactly how you stand. You, I see, are dressed as a young farmer in comfortable circumstances. How about your friend?"

"He is dressed as a farm-hand, sir; and I have also a Kaffir with me to look after the horses."

"Is your companion Dutch?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are not, I think. You speak Taal very well, but I fancy I can detect that it is not your own language."

"That is so," Yorke agreed; "but I am glad to say that you are the first person who has noticed it."

"I am not surprised at that, for you really speak it very well; it is more the tone of your voice than anything wrong in the language—or I may call it the dialect—that is noticeable."

"I have learned it partly from books, sir, but chiefly from conversing in it almost entirely for six months."

"You must have the knack of learning languages if you have picked it up so well in so short a time. You have only arrived here to-day, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, half an hour ago."

"From Johannesburg?"

Yorke made a gesture of assent.

"You were, I suppose, intimate with Mr. Chambers?"

"I can scarcely say that I was intimate with him, but my man—for he is my servant as well as my friend—happened to overhear a plot to murder Mr. Chambers and loot his house,

and he, with my Kaffir, Mr. Chambers and myself, gave the ruffians so warm a reception that there is not likely to be a repetition of the attempt."

"Were they a strong party?"

"There were twelve of them, and only two got away alive. The really dangerous part of the affair was that the three men in the house were also in the plot; but we had tied them up before the others arrived."

"That was a very thorough piece of business indeed," Mr. von Rensburg said, more warmly than he had spoken before; "and I can well understand now that my friend Chambers should be anxious to aid you in any way. Will you tell me a little more about it? You are not, I suppose, pressed for time."

"Not at all, sir;" and Yorke related more fully the incidents connected with the affair.

"It was a fortunate escape for Mr. Chambers. No doubt those scoundrels thought that he had money in the house. They would hardly have gone in such numbers if it had only been a question of ordinary robbery. And was your employment at the mine confined to this exploit?"

"Entirely, sir; but as the house stands on the mine property, Mr. Chambers said when he wrote the letter that he could say with a good conscience that I had been employed there."

"I have one question to ask: Are you personally known to anyone here? I mean, is there anyone whom you would be likely to meet who would recognize you?"

"No, sir, I don't think there is anyone here likely to have seen me before. And if there should be anyone, I am sure he would not know me in my present disguise."

"I asked the question," Mr. von Rensburg went on, "as in that case there is no occasion for me to make any instant decision as to the route you had better take. If there had been any danger of your being recognized I should say you had better start to-morrow morning early; but as it is, we can take our time about it."

"I am in no very pressing hurry, though I should be glad

to be on the other side of the Orange River as soon as I can. I have already been away nearly seven weeks."

"I can guess pretty well who you are, Mr. Meyring," the other said with a smile, "though I don't want to know. I should certainly be glad if you would take up your residence here while you remain, but I think it is better that you should not. I am not very popular here at present, because I opposed the Free State taking part with the Transvaal. I can call upon you at your hotel very well; because then, should there be any question, I can simply show the letter you first sent me in, and say that I know nothing more than that. I don't think it at all likely that any question will arise, and my coming to see you will be an advantage to you rather than otherwise, for it will show that you are not altogether an unknown person. I will this evening think over what people I know on the different roads, where parties of our men are stationed, and how you had best proceed."

"Thank you very much, sir! At what hour are you likely to call?"

"We will say ten o'clock. I will bring a good map I have with me—or, no, I had better merely call and ask for you, and then bring you here. It would look strange if you were to ask for a private room, and we certainly cannot talk that over in the public room. They will not know that you have been here to-night, and you had better send your man with this letter again in the morning. Tell him before the landlord, or anyone else, that he is to take the letter to me, and say that you have arrived, and will call upon me at any hour that is convenient in reference to the business."

This programme was carried out, and at ten o'clock Yorke was standing at the door of the hotel when Mr. von Rensburg came up. He went into the hotel without noticing Yorke, and said to the landlord: "You have a Mr. Meyring staying here, have you not?"

"Yes, sir; he was outside just now." He went to the door. "There he is, sir," he said, pointing to Yorke.

Mr. von Rensburg went up to him. "My name is von Rensburg, Mr. Meyring. I did not know when I should be disengaged, so did not send an answer to the letter you brought, but I am free now, and if you will come with me to my house, we will talk over the business you mentioned, and see which commando you had better join."

"Thank you, sir! I am naturally anxious to lose no time. I should certainly prefer joining the force which is likely to be engaged soonest." The innkeeper and two other men lounging near heard what he said, and paid no further attention to them as they walked off.

Once in Mr. von Rensburg's parlour the latter said: "It will not be an easy matter to get through. The drifts are all guarded, both on the Orange River and the Riet. Of course the nearest way is through Petrusburg and Jacobsdal, but I put that out of the question. Then there is the road through Fauresmith and across the Orange at Zoutpans Drift, but that also is a long way round. I believe that as good a way as any would be to take the Boshof road across the Modder at Truters Drift. From there a road keeps along for three miles north of the Modder, and leads finally to Kimberley; it cuts the road from Boshof to Jacobsdal. But at that point there are strong forces to prevent the British from trying to make a detour that way. These are the names of the various commandos there, and at Jacobsdal, and at the drifts across the Orange.

"The safest way, though longer in miles, would be to go south to Bethulie, as if you were going to join the commando at Steynsburg, or better still, Colesberg. Once past Colesberg you would find no difficulty in making your way to De Aar. I could help you more that way than any other, because I could get a pass for you, and your horses, your servant, and the Kaffir, direct by rail to Colesberg; so that really you would not lose so much time as you might think, for from Colesberg to De Aar is not much more than half the distance that it is from here to Jacobsdal. The Philippolis commando is there."

"I know the country on the other side of the Seacow River," Yorke said, "and once past Colesberg could make my way easily enough. I would much rather choose that line. Once at De Aar I should not have much more than a hundred miles to ride to the Modder, even if I could not get up by train."

"Then I will see the officer in charge of the railway arrangements, and find out when a train is going down to Colesberg with ammunition and supplies, and if he is not taking any horses down, will get him to put on a truck for your animals. What do you mean to do with your cart?"

"Mr. Chambers said I could do anything I liked with it. It would only be in my way now, for the tracks beyond Colesberg west are as much as horses can manage. Besides, I should find it more difficult to get away from the town in a vehicle than on horseback."

"Well, if I were you I would speak to the innkeeper; he would be likely to know someone who would want to buy it. If not, you had better leave it with him, and tell him that you are so anxious to get to the front that you do not care about wasting time here looking about for a purchaser; and ask him to sell it for you, and to keep the money until you return for it. You must appear careful about it, for no Dutch farmer, however well off, would throw away the value of a good cart. You had therefore better ask him to write to you at the post-office, Colesberg, telling you what sum he has sold it for."

"As he knows that I have come here, sir, I might ask him to hand the money over to you, as you have kindly offered to remit it to me."

"Yes, it would be as well to seem as anxious as possible. When I come round this afternoon to tell you the result of my enquiries about the trains, I will look at the cart"

"It is a very good one, sir, of Cape Colony make, and it only wants repainting to appear quite new."

"In that case I will tell the innkeeper that if he does not know of anyone who will buy it at once, I will give you the sum he and I may value it at, and if at the end of a week he

doesn't find a purchaser at that price, I will take it myself. A cart more or less makes but little difference, and you may as well have the money as let the innkeeper put it in his pocket."

"But the money ought to go back to Mr. Chambers, sir."

"It will be much more useful in your pocket than in his. He gave you the thing to do as you liked with, and certainly will not expect to be paid for it, and would be hurt rather than pleased at the money being sent to him. No doubt you will find uses for it."

The innkeeper, however, knew of a trader in the town who wanted a good cart, and the matter was arranged in a few minutes. There was a train going that evening, and with an order signed by the military secretary at Bloemfontein for Gert Meyring and Hans Bernard, both going to join the Philippolis commando at Colesberg, accompanied by a Kaffir boy, to travel by military train, they started that evening. It was an open truck, but as they had brought blankets and horse-rugs in the cart, for sleeping on the veldt, they preferred the night journey to being exposed to the scorching rays of the sun all day. It took some fifteen hours to cover the distance between Bloemfontein and Colesberg. After getting the horses out of the truck, they saddled them, slung their rifles and bandoliers over their shoulders, strapped the blankets behind the saddles, and then rode into the town, which was little more than a long single street extending along the bottom of a very narrow valley.

Peter had been most reluctant to leave his rifle behind him at Bloemfontein, and had been allowed to bring it, saying that if he were questioned he could say that it was a spare rifle belonging to Yorke. As it was notorious that in the battles of Graspan and Belmont many of the richer Boers had been attended by servants, who loaded spare rifles, and so enabled them to keep up a steady fire, Yorke had consented, as at the worst it could but be taken away for the use of some Boer with an inferior weapon, and he felt that the time

might come when it would be well that Peter should be able to give efficient aid. A good many armed men were in the street, but they paid no attention to the new-comers. Yorke avoided the principal inn, where the field-cornet of the commando would probably have taken up his quarters, and alighted at another of less pretension.

"Have you a room disengaged?" he asked the landlord on entering.

The landlord looked doubtful.

"I don't want to commandeer a room," Yorke went on; "I pay for what I have."

The landlord's face brightened. "Yes, I have a double-bedded room vacant."

"That will do, though I should have liked two single ones. My native boy will, of course, sleep in the stable with the horses. If you will show me my room he will carry up my spare rifle and blankets there. We shall want a meal at once, for we have but just arrived by train from Bloemfontein."

The meal was a good one, and after it was eaten Yorke went to the bar; the landlord was standing behind it. "I will pay for our meals as we have them," Yorke said, "and for the room for to-night. I don't know when I may be off, and I may be sent suddenly away, so that it is as well to keep things squared up. So please add the charge for the stable and food for the horses."

The landlord made out the bill, and when he had paid it Yorke said, "I should like to have a talk with you. It is difficult to get news at Bloemfontein as to what is going on down here, and as I have only just arrived, I am altogether ignorant as to the situation."

"If you will come into my parlour behind the bar I will tell you what I know."

"I dare say you have some good cigars?" Yorke asked when they were seated.

"Yes, but I don't sell many of them at present."

He took a box out of a cupboard, where it was hidden

under some corks and dusters. Yorke took out two, handed one to the landlord and lighted the other himself.

"You are English, I see."

"Yes, we are mostly English here—worse luck just at present."

"I am English too," Yorke said, speaking for the first time in his own language.

The landlord looked at him in astonishment. "I should never have thought it," he said. "You speak Dutch ever so much better than I do, and you look like a Boer all over."

"Yes, I am disguised. I have made my way down from Johannesburg, and I want to get through the Boer lines. That is what I want to talk to you about. Where are they now? First, tell me what has been done here."

"Well, on the 1st of November the Boers came in here, and had their own way for two months. Then on the 1st of January General French came up and surrounded the place, and there was fighting in the hills for two or three days; but the Boers captured a company of the Suffolks who attacked a hill outside the town, and they were afterwards reinforced so strongly that, after repulsing one attack, French retired, and things have been quiet since. The English hold Molteno. A good many men have gone down that way."

"Do you know what commandos are here now?"

"They are principally Colonial rebels, some from the west and some from the south."

"You have the Philippolis commando here, have you not?"

"We had till yesterday, and then they were summoned to go to Steynsburg, for they say that one of our columns is advancing against Dordrecht."

"That is lucky, for my railway pass says that I am going to join that commando. Now that I find they are gone I cannot report myself, and therefore escape questioning. How many Boers are there in and around here?"

"From a thousand to twelve hundred."

"How have they been behaving?"

The landlord shrugged his shoulders. "They take pretty well what they want, and give bits of paper which they say will be paid when the war is over; they mean, out of the money they expect to get from our government as an indemnity. Of course we don't look at it in that light, and only keep them in the hope that they will be a proof of the losses that we have suffered, and that our government will take them up when they finally thrash the Boers."

"And where are these twelve hundred men?"

"There are three or four hundred of them on the hills round the town. They have got some guns there, to keep us in order, as they say. Most of the others are wandering about in bands, and plundering the farms of the loyal settlers. I fancy they have some small parties out towards the west, keeping a sharp look-out lest a force should come this way from De Aar; but I think they trust chiefly to their getting news from the Dutch farmers between Hanover and the railway there."

"Then my best way, undoubtedly, would be to cross the Seacow River either by the road leading north-west to Hopetown, or from that to Philipstown, or by the third road to Hanover. The north road is least likely to be watched, as any force from De Aar would certainly come either through Philipstown or through Hanover."

"You seem to know the country well," the landlord said in surprise.

"I do not know it on this side of the river; I know it pretty well on the other; and once across, I have little fear of being captured. Who is the field-cornet in command?"

"Moens; he is in command of the party on the hills, and, I believe, generally of them all."

"It is as well to know, though I don't want to see him; but when I once get outside the circle of hills I can tell any Boers that I may fall in with that I am ordered by him to watch the banks of the river."

"How long do you mean to stay?" the landlord asked.

"It is two o'clock now," Yorke said; "I would rather not go till to-morrow. I should like to see a little of the country, and the horses have only had a day's rest after eight days' hard travelling, so I will go out into the town and see where

the road I intend to go by leaves it. I shall want to buy some things for the journey, for I cannot reckon upon getting to De Aar in much less than three days."

"I will get you anything you want," the landlord said. "I have plenty of bread and meat in the house, and could put a couple of bottles of good wine into your saddle-bag."

"Thank you! that would be best, especially as I shall want the meat cooked. There are three of us, and as we sha'n't have much else, we can do with at least two pounds a day each, and about the same quantity of bread. We shall want a bag of mealies for the horses, they wouldn't pick up much on the veldt. I have got six water-bottles, which it will be as well to fill before we start, for we may cross the river in a hurry, and there is not much chance of finding water in any of the spruits. We have got tin mugs, and the only other thing we require is some tobacco; I forgot to lay in a supply at Bloemfontein. Can you pick up a pony for my Kaffir?"

Yorke now went out and joined Hans, who was waiting for him in the street. Looking carelessly at the shops as they went along, they made their way out of the town, and, having been directed by the innkeeper, struck off by the road they intended to follow without having to ask any questions. They went about half a mile and then returned, as it would have seemed unnatural for them to be seen walking farther.

"I think we know as much as we need about it now," Yorke said. "We may as well go back to the inn. It is quite evident that we are not likely to be asked any questions here, nor, indeed, as far as I can see, anywhere, unless we come upon an outpost."

They loitered about the streets for an hour. No one spoke to them, for the Boer force there was composed of men from various parts of the Colony, as well as from the Free State, and as they were to a great extent unknown to each other, a fresh face excited no attention. Yorke on their return found the landlord had bought a stout pony for Peter. Half an hour later Peter ran into their room.

"Baas," he exclaimed, "there are three Boers looking at our horses. They say that one of them is stolen."

Yorke and Hans caught up their rifles and bandoliers and ran downstairs.

"I was rubbing them down, baas, in the yard when they came in, and one of them pointed to the brand on the horse you ride and said he knew it. Then they asked who was my master, and I said, 'Mr. Meyring'; and he said, 'I have reason to believe that this horse is stolen from a friend of mine. If he is in the inn tell him to come here.'"

The yard was at the back of the house, with a gate opening into a lane behind it. As they entered it Yorke started involuntarily, for he recognized in one of the men who was standing by his horse his old enemy Dirck Jansen; it had never occurred to him that, as Richmond lay but some eighty miles from Colesberg, this was the point Dirck would be most likely to make for as soon as it was seized by the men of the Free State. Fortunately Dirck's back was towards him and he did not notice the momentary pause.

"Where did you get this horse, sir?" Dirck asked authoritatively.

"I am not accustomed to be questioned in that tone," Yorke said quietly. "I have had the horse for some months. I had it at Pretoria."

"It has been stolen," Dirck said angrily. "It belonged to a neighbour of mine near Richmond. I have seen him riding it, and I know well that he would never have sold it. I don't say that you stole it, I simply say that it was stolen; and unless you can prove to me that you came by it honestly, I shall take it."

"I am not in the habit of carrying receipts about me for months," Yorke said; "nor do I show them to the first stranger who rudely asks for them. My man here can confirm what I say, that I have had the animal for more than six months."

The calmness with which Yorke answered him still further excited the passionate young Boer, and he turned suddenly upon Hans, on whose face there was a broad grin of amusement.

"You insolent young lout," he exclaimed, "how dare you laugh when your betters are talking!" and he brought down his heavy whip upon his head, knocking off his hat, and almost striking him to the ground. "Ah!" he exclaimed, as he saw his face plainly, "I know you now. You are the fellow who ran away from Allnutt's farm. Now I understand it. This

no doubt is—" and he turned towards Yorke. But before the name was out of his lips, Yorke sprung at him, and with the same blow that had once before proved so effective, knocked him off his feet, his head striking heavily on the pavement of the yard.

His two companions raised a shout, and would have thrown themselves upon Yorke, but Peter, who had scarcely taken in the purport of the conversation, sprang upon one of them and grasped him by the throat. Hans had, as he recovered from the blow he had received, snatched his rifle from his shoulder, and, grasping it by the muzzle, met the other Boer with a sweeping stroke, which caught him on the temple, and prostrated him apparently lifeless on the ground.

"Hold that fellow tight, Peter," Yorke said sharply; "choke him if he struggles.

"Hans, fetch one of the picket ropes from the stable. Now, tie Dirck up, hand and foot, tightly, and shove my handkerchief into his mouth. That will do for the present; we will fasten him more securely afterwards. Now, help me to carry him into the stable. That is right. Drop him down in this empty stall. Now another rope, and then we will tie the fellow Peter has hold of. Peter, slacken your hold a little, he is black in the face. Now, round his legs first, Hans. That will do. Now, Peter, we will drag him into the stable; there is no fear of his shouting for a minute or two. Now, Hans, for your man; I rather fancy you have killed him. We can't help it whether you have or not. Now you can tie them more securely, and gag Dirck and Peter's man effectually. We need not trouble about the third; if he does come round, it won't be for a long time. Now we will drag them to the farthest stall, so that if anyone happens to look into the stable he won't notice them unless he enters. Now, Hans, run upstairs and fetch down the blankets and things. You saddle the horses; I will look in and pay for the horse and other things the landlord has bought for us."

"You have got the things for which I asked you, landlord?"

"Yes, they are all in this basket."

"Thanks! I will pack them in my saddle-bags at once. I am off in a hurry. I have just been recognized by one of these Boers, and haven't a minute to lose. Let me know what

I owe you altogether. I will pack these things while you are making out the account. Where is your Kaffir boy? he is not in the yard."

"I have sent him into the town on an errand.'

"Well, when he returns, will you manage to send him somewhere else that will keep him from going to the stables for the next hour. I have a particular reason for wishing that no one shall enter them for at least that time. It is just as well that I should not tell you why."

The landlord nodded. "The best thing you can do, sir, is to lock the door and bring me the key, in case any Boers ride up and want to put their horses there. I may mislay it for a quarter of an hour. If they are only staying for a short time, they will probably content themselves with leaving the horses in the yard when they find they cannot get into the stables."

"Thank you very much! I think an hour will give us a fair start, for at any rate we could not be overtaken before it gets dark."

Five minutes later Yorke and Hans rode out into the yard, followed by Peter, and were soon clear of the town. They now put their horses into a trot, the native keeping eight or ten lengths behind. They slackened their pace a little as they passed between two hills, on which parties of Boers were posted. There was nothing unusual in their riding out to join the scouting parties, and no attention was paid to them. When well beyond this point, they again quickened their pace.

"It is a pity you did not kill Dirck, Master Yorke," Hans said; "he will always be a trouble."

"I could not kill him in cold blood, Hans; though, if it had been a fight, I should have done so without hesitation. He has tried to kill me twice, and I should feel myself perfectly justified in taking his life. However, we can congratulate ourselves on having got out of that scrape so easily. If the alarm had been given, nothing could have saved us. You and I would have been denounced as spies, and shot without the semblance of a trial. We will endeavour to cross the river to-night, if we can get down to the bank without interruption. If we were to meet any party now, our story that we have just joined the commando, and have been sent by

Moens on outpost duty to begin with, would do as long as we are posted on the river. But this would hardly be good enough if we cross, especially as we do not know whether any parties are beyond it; and as we may have a lot of them out in pursuit of us in half an hour, we cannot risk being detained. Besides, it will be quite dark by the time we get there, and naturally we should wait till morning before crossing the river. So we will go on till we believe we are about a mile from it, and then turn off, strike the river, and if it is too dark then to choose a place for crossing, wait till morning. But if we don't find the banks too steep, we will swim the horses over. I sha'n't be comfortable until we are on the other side.

"We need not worry ourselves, but will let the horses go at their own pace, so as to be fresh if we are chased. Besides, if we are going at a leisurely pace, we shall not attract any particular attention should we be seen by the scouts on the neighbouring hills."

They went at a fast canter now.

"I am afraid that it is too light to go on," Yorke said, when he guessed that they were within three miles of the river. "We will turn off to the left, and when we get to a place where we cannot be seen from any of the hills, we will halt till it is nearly dark, then we will turn back, recross the road, and keep along on the north side of it. If anyone in search of us comes along and questions the Boer outposts, if they get any information at all, it will be that we were seen to turn off to the left of the road, and they will think that we intend to cross either by the Hanover Road, or that of Philipstown, or to swim the river between them. Of course that would be our natural line to De Aar, and it is at these points their scouts will be most vigilant, for any hostile movement would come from De Aar, and not from the north road through Petrusville. This is so evident, that I have great doubts whether they would even place a guard at that crossing."

This plan was carried out. Recrossing the road after dark, they kept close to it, pausing and listening occasionally for the sound of horsemen.

"They have gone by other roads," Yorke said. "Now, Peter," he went on, "you have better ears than any of us, and

your footsteps will not be heard. We will keep half a mile behind you, and will lead the horses. When you get near the river, you must go very cautiously, and find out whether there are any men on guard there. When you have discovered that, run back with the news. Of course, if no one is there, we shall come straight on and cross. If there is a guard, we will turn to the right and strike the river a mile higher up, and cross if we can."

Peter at once set off at a run, the others following at a leisurely walk. In half an hour he rejoined them.

"No one is there, baas, and the water is low, and we can cross the drift easily enough."

"That is good. We will push on at once, then, for if those fellows in the stables were discovered soon after we left, we may have a party in pursuit of us along this road, as well as the others, even now."

They mounted and went on at a trot to the river. It was of some width, but it was not too deep for the horses to ford. They had gone a quarter of a mile on the other side, when Peter said, "Listen, master, horses coming." They drew rein, and sat listening for two or three minutes. They could hear nothing. Then there was a low sound, which rapidly increased in volume until it came to an abrupt halt. Then on the still night air they could hear a volley of execrations.

"They have reached the river. We only had ten minutes to spare," Yorke said. "I don't think they will pursue us any farther, as they cannot be sure that we have come by this road, though they must have learned from the men on the hills that we started for it; but we might easily have crossed to the Philippolis side after we got out of sight. At any rate, they know that they would have no chance of catching us to-night, as we should only have to move two or three hundred yards off the road to be well out of sight. Now, Peter, tear up one of the blankets and muffle the horses' feet; they could hear us a long way off in the stillness."

"I will do that, baas; but they too angry and talk too much to hear us."

"That is likely enough, Peter; but there is nothing like being on the safe side."

Five minutes sufficed to muffle the feet of the horses, and

then they continued their journey, keeping on the road, sometimes going at a trot, and sometimes walking, until they had covered, they calculated, some twenty miles from the river. Then they moved off a few hundred yards, opened the saddle-bags, and had a good meal, gave the horses a feed of mealies, and lay down for the night. They were on the move again at daybreak. Yorke had decided to go on as far as the little stream called the Hondebloss, where they could give the horses a drink and fill up the water-bottles, which they had not had time to do before leaving, though fortunately they had watered their horses at the small stream that runs through Colesberg. It was possible that there might be a Boer force at Petrusville, and therefore he determined to strike due west from the river for Potfontein Siding. The distance was too far to be traversed in a day, without the risk of knocking up the horses. Consequently they camped out on the veldt that night, and arrived at the little railway-station the next morning.

Here they found a company of militia, whose officer at first regarded them with some suspicion. Yorke had, however, that morning stowed away his wig as before, and Hans had cut off the long fringe of hair under his straw-hat, and on stripping off his coat and flannel shirt, Yorke showed the khaki uniform underneath, with shoulder-strap with the badges showing the number of his corps. The story, too, that he had escaped from Pretoria was recognized to be true.

"You will have to ride up to the Modder, there is no getting into a train here. Troops are passing up every day. I suppose you know that Lord Roberts has now arrived to take the command. He reached Cape Town on the 10th of January. Lord Kitchener came with him as chief of his staff. We expect them to come through in a few days. Our troops have been pouring up fast. No doubt there will be a forward movement directly he arrives. It is a frightful nuisance being stuck down here guarding the line. So you have come down from Pretoria? How did you manage to get away?"

"It is a long story," Yorke replied. "I shall have time to give it to you at full length presently. As Lord Roberts has not yet come up, I shall give my horses a couple of days' rest.

They have made a tremendous journey. We drove from Pretoria to Bloemfontein, averaging nearly fifty miles a day, got a lift in the train down to Colesberg, and have come from there in two days."

"They certainly deserve a rest then before going ninety miles from here to the Modder."

"I wish I could get a lift in a train. Our horses have done very heavy work lately. We should have three days' ride of thirty miles each to the Modder; it would be much pleasanter for us to be able to go by train than have to ride all the way."

"I am afraid I cannot manage that," the officer said. "Quantities of stores are going up, and lots of Kaffirs accompany them to help handle them and do heavy work. If you had been on foot, of course you could have gone, but we have no empty trucks we could put on for the horses. And now I suppose you are hungry. We have nothing but bully beef to offer you. There is no getting up stores at present, and we have none but our rations."

"Thank you! I breakfasted before starting. I have some five or six pounds of excellent cold beef, which I hope you will join me in eating. I have also a couple of bottles of wine and a tin of biscuits."

"That is reversing the usual order of things," the officer laughed. "However, we are not men to stand on ceremony. At any rate, we will add your fare to ours."

An hour later Yorke sat down to a meal with the three officers of the detachment; and he then related the story of his escape from Pretoria, and, without alluding to the treasure, told how Hans had overheard the plot to attack the house of the English president of one of the mines, and how they had defeated it.

"You may well say that your man is a good fellow, and that native of yours also. Your servant is eating his supper now with the non-commissioned officers, and, by the laughter, I have no doubt he is giving them his account of his adventures."

The next two days were spent quietly in resting the horses, and with good feeding they were again fit for travel. On the following morning they mounted early and rode to Orange

River station. Yorke was hospitably entertained by one of the officers of a regiment stationed there, while Hans and Peter were equally well looked after. Two days afterwards they rode into the camp on the Modder River.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY

THE camp had grown vastly in size during the eight weeks Yorke had been away. He went at once to the camp now occupied by General Pole-Carew's brigade. On his sending in his name, the general himself came to the door of his tent.

"Well, Mr. Harberton," he exclaimed, "how on earth have you got back so soon? We heard from a telegram through Lourenço Marques that you had escaped, but that was little more than a fortnight since, and I did not expect that you could have joined us again for another three weeks at least. You are just in time. We expect Lord Roberts to-morrow, and you may be sure that he will not lose a day when he arrives. By the way, Lucas has returned, and I am sorry to say that I have no vacancy on my staff; but I shall be seeing Lord Methuen this afternoon, and I will ask him, if he has an opportunity, to mention you to Lord Roberts, saying how you got into Kimberley and out again, and now have made your escape from Pretoria, and that your knowledge of Dutch makes you a most valuable staff-officer. Possibly the chief may like to have you on his staff as interpreter and so on, for these Boers all make a point of pretending that they do not understand English, although there is no doubt that almost all of them in the Free State, and a considerable portion of the Transvaal men, do so. I suppose you would rather be on the staff than join your regiment?"

"I certainly would rather be with Lord Roberts, sir. I should be sure to see what is going on then, while I might not be so lucky if I were with the cavalry."

"I will speak to Lord Methuen about it. I have an hour to spare just at the present time, so you might tell me how you escaped from Pretoria. Of course I know how you were taken."

Yorke gave an account of his adventures.

"Well, you are a lucky fellow in having two such followers as the Dutchman and the Kaffir. The last got you out of the hands of the Boers at Boshof, and now the Dutchman has got you out of Pretoria. You remind me of the *Three Musketeers*. I suppose you have read that story?"

"Yes, sir, and I always thought it ought to be called the Four Musketeers."

The general smiled. "That escape of yours at Colesberg was an exceptionally narrow thing," he said, "and I must really congratulate you on the way you managed it. Well, I suppose you will go to your regiment now. Give my compliments to the colonel, and say that I wish you to remain in camp for a few days, in case Lord Roberts may desire to hear from you something about the state of the prisons at Pretoria and what you saw as you came down."

"It is a good thing to have a fellow like you in the regiment, Harberton," the colonel said that evening after mess was over. "Your stories give us something fresh to think about, and anything that keeps us from talking of the eternal subject of what Lord Roberts is likely to do when he gets here is an unmixed pleasure. Besides, gentlemen, there is no saying what the fortunes of war may bring forth, and some of us may see the inside of a Boer prison before it is all over. Now we know how Mr. Harberton got away, we may get some hints that may be useful to us—for instance, how he got through those wire fences."

"Yes, colonel," the major said; "but as we cannot any of us speak Dutch his example of the manner in which he made his way down would not be of any use whatever to us. A prisoner can think of a dozen ways of getting out of a prison; he might throttle a warder, dress himself up in his clothes, and march out. But what could he do after he was out? He couldn't buy as much as a crust of bread and cheese or a glass of beer, and the first time he opened his lips he would be seized."

"There would be difficulties, no doubt; but you know two or three officers have got away, and I am pretty sure none of them spoke Dutch. Now, if any of you gentlemen had taken such pains as Mr. Harberton to acquire the language you might have distinguished yourself as he has done. The regiment was out here before he landed, and there is not one of you who can put a sentence together in Dutch."

"Come, colonel, don't be too hard on us," one of the captains said. "We had no occasion to speak a word of Dutch at the Cape, and certainly we have had no opportunity since we left it."

"That is true enough," the colonel agreed; "but"—and he went on more gravely—"it has been evident for many months that war was probable, and it would have been well—I speak for myself as well as for you—if we had devoted an hour or two a day to getting up the language, for we should have known that it was sure to be useful in case of a campaign, and we have all frequently felt the difficulty of obtaining information from the farmers when scouting. We have missed a good opportunity, and very often time has hung heavy on our hands in spite of polo and other amusements. One does not expect to find many studious men in a cavalry regiment; still, I do wonder that none of us saw what an advantage it would be to speak Dutch. Look at Mr. Harberton and see what he has gained by his industry. He has been employed on dangerous service, he succeeds in getting into Kimberley, he obtains a commission thereby, and now it has carried him safely through the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and will probably cause him to be selected for other special work."

"There is no credit due to me, sir," Yorke said. "I certainly did work at Dutch on the voyage out, but afterwards, being on a Dutch farm and scarcely hearing English spoken, I had to learn the language, and had continual opportunities of mastering it."

"That is all very well," the colonel said, "but there are many fellows who, had they been in your position, would not have learned much. You tell me that your cousin is English, and certainly your man Hans speaks our language, and thus you could, had you chosen, have got on very fairly

without Dutch, and though you may disclaim any credit, that does not in any way alter the fact."

"I thought I heard firing as we came along this morning. Has there been any, sir?" Yorke asked, in order to change the conversation.

"Yes, the fighting began again on the 3rd. Macdonald with the Highland Brigade, two squadrons of ours, a field-battery, and some engineers, moved down to Koodoosberg Drift, seventeen miles away. On the 6th the engineers began to erect a fort, but the Boers soon mustered very strongly, and the position was commanded by a kopje to the north. Skirmishing went on all day, and yesterday two batteries of horse-artillery and a brigade of cavalry reinforced Macdonald. The fighting has gone on all day, but our guns have, we hear, gradually driven the Boers back. I expect the force will be recalled when Lord Roberts arrives to-morrow. I imagine it was only intended to keep the Boers' attention occupied in that direction, and lead them to believe that the intention was to turn their position on their right flank, and so relieve Kimberley without having to again attack their position at Magersfontein. Of course none of us know what Lord Roberts's plans are, but I hardly think that, if he had intended to carry out that line of attack, he would have called the Boers' attention to the fact until he was perfectly ready to begin."

"There must be a very large force here now, colonel, judging from the size of the camp."

"Yes, in addition to the division that fought their way here, there are now, counting those at the stations between this and De Aar, three others—some twenty-five thousand infantry; and we have now ninety-eight guns altogether. Counting our cavalry, which now musters nearly five thousand sabres, there must be over forty thousand men between Orange River Station and this place—a very different force from that with which Methuen attempted to relieve Kimberley in the first place. Cronje will have all his work cut out for him to keep his grip on the town."

The next morning Lord Roberts, with Lord Kitchener and his staff, reached the Modder River. Their arrival created immense enthusiasm among the troops. Lord Roberts had

long been the popular hero of the British army. Not only had he accomplished all that he had undertaken—and his name been associated with the long series of successes in India—but his care for the comfort of the soldiers, his kindness of heart and cheeriness of manner, had won their affection, and every soldier felt that under "Bobs"—the name by which he was universally known among the rank and file—they would speedily turn the tables on the Boers. The arrival of Lord Kitchener on the scene was of scarcely less importance than was that of the commander-in-chief. He had in Egypt shown not only the qualifications necessary for a leader of men, but an extraordinary power of organization, and since his arrival at the Cape a month previously he had effected wonders.

When he landed there was practically no transport, and the consequence was that the army had to depend entirely upon the railway, and could not have moved more than two or three days' march away from it. Now an immense train had been organized, and the army could, if necessary, cut itself loose from the railway, and depend for ten days or a fortnight upon its own supplies. His position as chief on Lord Roberts's staff went far to ensure that no mistake would occur, that every movement would be effected as perfectly as human forethought could arrange it, and that every detail would be seen to, every contingency prepared for. In character, however, the two great leaders differed greatly. With every faculty concentrated upon his work Lord Kitchener never spared himself, and he expected an equal devotion to duty from all under his command, officers and men alike. He was a man of iron, one who could make but small allowance for the weakness of others, would admit of no carelessness, and had no sympathy with the love of amusement and the easy-going manner of doing work that were characteristic of no inconsiderable proportion of the younger officers of the army.

He was admired and respected, but he had not Lord Roberts's knack of making himself loved by all with whom he came in contact. The twenty years of scouting, campaigning, and working in Egypt had given him something of the nature of the Arabs and natives with whom he had been associated. His face afforded no index to his thoughts. He spoke but little, but it was always to the point; his eyes had the far-

away look of one constantly scanning the distance for the approach of an enemy; his anger expressed itself only in a few quiet words that cut like whips. His appearance in camp was at once the sign for additional activity, sharper discipline, and an increased attention to duties of all kinds. No better right hand could have been chosen by Lord Roberts for the work to be done, and wherever things went a little wrong it needed but Kitchener's presence to set them right again.

Not a day was lost. Lord Roberts arrived on the morning of the 8th, and the next evening the force from Koodoosberg returned to camp, and a series of orders were that day quietly issued. On the 11th the cavalry division under General French, with seven batteries of horse-artillery and two field-batteries, left the Modder River camp for Ramdam, a large pool near the Riet River, five miles south of the village of Koffyfontein; and General Tucker, with the 7th infantry division, marched to the same point from the railway-station of Enslin and Graspan; the other divisions were ordered to hold themselves in readiness to move. That morning one of Lord Roberts's aides-de-camp rode into the camp of the 9th Lancers and asked for Lieutenant Harberton, to accompany him at once to head-quarters, as Lord Roberts wished to speak to him.

Yorke congratulated himself now that he had, two days after Magersfontein, bought the entire kit of an officer who had been killed there, and this included a tunic, breeches, and gaiters that had never been worn. In these he hurriedly attired himself for the first time and then mounted his horse, which had been standing ready saddled in case he should receive any order, and accompanied the aide-de-camp. On reaching the head-quarter camp they dismounted, an orderly took their horses, and the officer, entering the tent of the commander-in-chief, returned at once, telling Yorke that he was to enter.

"Lord Methuen has given me an outline of your services, Mr. Harberton," Lord Roberts said kindly. "The story is really a remarkable one, and shows a singular amount of enterprise, courage, and coolness on the part of so young an officer. What is even more to the point at the present moment is, you have shown you can speak Dutch well—at

any rate, well enough to pass as a Boer, and that you can also converse to some extent to Kaffirs in their own tongue. Captain Watermeyer is the only member of my staff who can speak Dutch well, and I am sure he will be glad of your assistance in examining prisoners, farmers, or natives; therefore I have much pleasure in appointing you as an extra aide-de-camp."

"Thank you, sir! I feel it is a high honour indeed that you have conferred upon me."

"It is a well-deserved one; and as you made the journey to Kimberley, and also, as I hear, have followed the road down from Pretoria through Johannesburg to Bloemfontein, you will be valuable for other purposes besides those of an interpreter, and I consider myself fortunate in obtaining your services. Colonel Chamberlain, will you tell Captain Watermeyer that I wish to see him?"

On the arrival of that officer Lord Roberts said: "Captain Watermeyer, I have appointed Lieutenant Harberton an extra aide-de-camp. He speaks Dutch well, and you will, I am sure, find him of great assistance when you have to question prisoners or other Dutch who may be brought into camp. When not required for such work he will perform the usual duties of an aide-de-camp. Will you kindly introduce him to the other members of my staff, and request Colonel Pretyman to arrange for his tenting and other accommodation? I hear, by the way, Mr. Harberton, that you have a Dutch servant who has proved himself a most faithful and valuable man, and also a Kaffir groom who went with you into Kimberley, and aided in effecting your escape from Pretoria. You will, of course, bring them with you in the same capacity here."

Lord Methuen was entering the tent as Yorke went out, and the latter thanked him warmly for his kindness in recommending him to the commander-in-chief.

"It is to General Pole-Carew that you are chiefly indebted," the general said; "he has seen much more of you than I have. I heard from him the full story of your adventures, and it was a pleasure to me to report your conduct to Lord Roberts. Pole-Carew told me that he was sorry he could not have your services in future—first, as his staff is complete, and in

the second place, as he will remain here with his brigade, with the force under my command."

Yorke then went off with Captain Watermeyer. "I remember your face well, Mr. Harberton," the latter said; "I know Major Mackintosh, who obtained a commission for you in his corps. I was not a member of it, for I was in the Cape Town Highlanders. I saw you several times at the hotel where you were then stopping."

"I remember you perfectly now, sir; but the khaki and helmet make such a difference that until you spoke I did not recognize you."

"Well, we have both got on since then; it had certainly never occurred to either of us that we should both be here as members of the commander-in-chief's staff."

"No, indeed," Yorke replied, "nothing could have been more unlikely—at any rate, as far as I was concerned."

"Well, as for the tenting, you may as well share mine, as I am alone at present and shall be glad of company."

Matters were quickly arranged with Colonel Pretyman, the head-quarters commandant. Captain Watermeyer's offer obviated all difficulty with regard to tentage, and Yorke would, of course, mess with other officers of the staff.

"I am afraid, Mr. Harberton," the officer said, "that you will not draw any extra pay as assistant aide-de-camp, though, possibly, with the addition of the word 'interpreter' in general orders, an allowance will be obtainable."

"That is a matter of comparative indifference to me, I have resources of my own that will enable me for at least some time to defray the extra expenses of the mess."

"That will not be very heavy," Colonel Pretyman said with a smile; "certainly as long as we are on the march you will find but few luxuries, though, when we are in towns, we indulge a little. As a whole, I should say that we live no better than the infantry messes, certainly not so well as the cavalry do now, though they too will have to leave the best part of their stores behind them when we once move."

"And about my servant, sir, who is now a trooper in my regiment?"

"He will draw rations and mess with the orderlies. There will be no difficulty about your Kaffir groom, several of us

have Cape boys in the same capacity, and of course he will go in with them."

As two or three officers had come in while they were talking, Yorke, knowing how busy the colonel was, at once left and rode back to the camp of the Lancers, and after getting his things together returned to the head-quarter camp with Hans and Peter. On the following morning Lord Roberts and his staff moved to Ramdam, while the cavalry went on to the Riet River, easily drove off small parties of Boers at two drifts, and reconnoitred beyond it. General Tucker's troops moved forward to one of the drifts, and their place at Ramdam was taken by Kelly-Kenny's division.

"You will go on with the cavalry to-morrow morning, Mr. Harberton," the deputy adjutant-general said to Yorke on the evening of their arrival at head-quarters at Ramdam. "They will push on ahead, and it is eminently important that the general should be informed of the progress they have made. The other aides-de-camp will be fully occupied in seeing that the movements of the infantry columns are proceeding without a hitch. The cavalry will push on to the Modder River to-morrow and seize one of the drifts. It is intended to reinforce them early the next morning, and they will then push on for Kimberley. You will remain with them until they have passed the point at which they are likely to meet with any serious opposition. Immediately they have done so you will bring the news to head-quarters, which will probably have then arrived at Jacobsdal, as the movements of the troops must be largely influenced by the success or failure of the cavalry expedition."

"Very well, sir."

Just before Yorke was about to leave the mess-room he was summoned to Lord Roberts's tent.

"Oh, Mr. Harberton! I only sent for you to tell you that I am going to ride myself to-morrow morning to see the cavalry make their start. I shall mount at five o'clock. You will ride with me."

It was a splendid sight when the commander-in-chief rode across Dekiel's Drift. There were gathered some five thousand horsemen, consisting of the Carbineers, the New South Wales Lancers, the Inniskillings, the regiment of Household Cavalry,

the 10th Hussars, the 9th, 12th, and 16th Lancers, the Scots Greys, Rimington's Guides, two brigades of mounted infantry, seven batteries of artillery, and the pontoon train of Royal Engineers. Although the whole had not passed the river until midnight they were all ready for the start, and the appearance of the commander-in-chief excited the greatest enthusiasm among them.

No time was lost in a formal inspection. After a few words with General French, who, hearing that Yorke was to accompany them, begged him to ride with him, Lord Roberts drew back and watched the great column of horse sweep past him, acknowledging the salutes of men and officers, and waving his hand in encouragement and farewell. The troops had every confidence in their commander, who had already given them sterling proofs of his ability. Had his advice been followed by General White at Ladysmith, four regiments of British cavalry would have been added to Buller's force, and would have gone far to protect Natal from Boer marauders, instead of remaining pent up in the besieged town until their horses were either dead or unfit for service. Recalled to take charge of the cavalry in the west, and to arrest the Boer advance into Cape Colony, he had effectually checked their progress, defeated them near Colesberg, and had by his activity confined them within a comparatively small district. Now he was leading them on the expedition with which his name will ever be associated.

It was a long march of thirty miles; the sun blazed down pitilessly, and there would be no water until they reached the Modder River. The general's staff were fully occupied in riding up and down the line seeing that all went well. The general kept Yorke by him throughout the march. He began the conversation by saying: "Lord Roberts tells me that you have already been into Kimberley and out again, and that you have been prisoner at Pretoria and have escaped. Let me hear about the Kimberley business first, it will pass the time away, if you do not mind."

Yorke was glad to remain at the head of the column with the general, for the dust raised as squadron followed squadron was stifling.

"You have certainly had your full share of adventures, Mr.

Harberton," the general said, when he had by close questioning extracted a pretty full account of his adventures from him. "Now, from what you have seen of the Boers, do you think that their resistance is likely to be an obstinate one?"

"I must say that I think so. Owing to the lies circulated by the Africander Bond, and by Kruger and the authorities at Pretoria, they have come to entertain a deep and passionate hatred of us, and although I feel sure that they will not be able to stand against us in open fight, I believe that they will maintain a desperate resistance of a guerrilla kind for a long time. They believe firmly that half the powers of Europe are coming to their assistance, and that in the long run England will be obliged to evacuate the Cape altogether. They have even been told that Russia, and France, and Germany have already declared war against us, and certainly no word of the truth will ever be allowed to be published among them. In an irregular war they would have an immense advantage in the great extent of the country, and the long lines of railway by which our communications would be kept up, and by the fact that they will be well informed of everything that we are doing by their friends, while we shall be entirely in the dark as to their movements. Lastly, their hopes will be sustained by their absolute conviction that the Dutch throughout the whole of Cape Colony will join them. From what I saw at the farm near Richmond, I should say that this view would be justified if they should gain but a single success that would give them encouragement. The fall either of Ladysmith, or Kimberley, or even Mafeking, would, I think, be followed by a great rising."

"I am afraid that you are right, Mr. Harberton. Certainly I found the Dutch population in the Colesberg and Stormberg district disloyal almost to a man, although individually none of them had any complaint to make against us. And, indeed, with an Africander parliament passing what laws they choose, and an absolute equality in all respects with the British colonists, it is hard to see what they could possibly gain by our expulsion from South Africa."

From time to time small parties of mounted Boers could be seen in the distance, and solitary scouts on the hills that skirted the plain over which they were travelling. Occasion-

ally shots were fired from distant hills, but to these the column paid no attention. Herds of deer were seen galloping across the plain, scared at the great moving dust-cloud. The column was in open order. The regiments moved two abreast with the 9th Lancers ahead. The heat was trying indeed to the horsemen, but more so to the horses. Several of the artillery animals dropped dead, and all were terribly exhausted by the time that the willows fringing the Modder were seen ahead. Major Rimington, who acted as guide, performed that duty well, and brought the column to the exact point at which he had aimed—the Klip Drift. Fortunately the Boer force stationed here was but a small one, and on seeing the great force approaching they abandoned their tents and waggons and fled hastily.

Now was seen the advantage that had been gained by the demonstration at Koodoosberg. The fear of being outflanked in that direction had caused the Boers to gather there, and they had little thought of the assault being delivered fifty miles away on their extreme left. Had they had the time and the knowledge, a few hundred men with guns could have made so desperate a resistance that help might have come up before our force was established on the north bank. As it was, they had passed across without a shot being fired. The horses drank their fill, the men bathed in the river, and by nightfall all were ready again for action. A halt had to be made the next day to enable Kelly-Kenny to come up with his division, and at five o'clock the following morning this arrived, the men having made a tremendous night march to cross the veldt. At eight o'clock the cavalry prepared for a final advance.

The Boers had utilized the time that the halt had allowed them, and during the preceding day considerable numbers had arrived and taken up a position on hills some four miles from the river. The distance from Klip Drift to Kimberley was forty miles, a distance that might, under other circumstances, have been traversed without much difficulty, but the horses had not yet recovered from the fatigue of their previous marches, and the heat of the sun was again terrible. However, the goal was Kimberley, and they believed, with reason, that once past the new position occupied by the Boers, they would meet with no further resistance, as they would

pass far to the east of the Magersfontein position, from which Cronje could not afford to send a large force while Methuen was facing him on the Modder.

The Boer position was upon two hills connected by a long, low neck, and as the force approached, a brisk fire of musketry, aided by some light guns, burst out.

A short halt was made, and the guns of the batteries that were not going on unlimbered and opened a heavy fire on the hills. As soon as this began to take effect the cavalry continued their advance, and in open order swept forward over the low neck regardless of the fire from the hills. A few men and horses dropped, but without drawing rein squadron after squadron swept along, and then at a more leisurely pace continued their journey. The rate of travel soon became slow, many of the troopers dismounted and walked by the side of their horses, some even carrying on their shoulders their valises in order to relieve the exhausted animals. It was late in the afternoon before, without meeting another foe, they entered Kimberley amid the enthusiasm of the population.

Yorke had ridden with the cavalry until they crossed the neck, and then turned his horse and galloped back to the Klip Drift with the news that the obstacles had been passed. Crossing the river, he rode for Jacobsdal. He heard firing as he approached the town, and when he arrived there, found that the place had been captured by Wavell's Brigade of the 7th Division, which had already joined Kelly-Kenny's at the Klip Drift. Learning that General Roberts would not arrive until the following morning, he started south and met the division with head-quarters on the way, and reported that the cavalry had already ridden through the Boer position and was on its way to Kimberley.

"By this time they will be there, then," Roberts said. "How were their horses?"

"I am afraid a great many will be lost before they reach Kimberley, sir. Owing to the heat yesterday, they had not time to recover from their previous marches."

"You have done very well to bring me the news so speedily," the general said. "I expected to find you at Jacobsdal to-morrow, but I had hardly hoped that you would have reached me this evening. You have had as long a ride as French."

The next morning the head-quarters reached Jacobsdal, and here received the news that one of the convoys of waggons had been attacked by the Boers at Waterval Drift, but were defending themselves. A battery of artillery with mounted infantry were sent off at once to their assistance, and with this aid the Boers were driven off. The native drivers of the waggons, however, had deserted during the fight; and as Lord Roberts had received news that Cronje and his whole force had left Magersfontein, he ordered the waggons to be abandoned, as everything depended upon speed to carry out successfully the operation upon which he was bent, namely, to cut off Cronje's retreat to Bloemfontein.

Cronje had sent a portion of his force with the greater part of his guns north. A good many of the Orange Free State men had deserted and gone back to their farms, but with the rest of his guns, six thousand mounted men, and a huge train of waggons, he had hurried along through the interval between French's horse and the force at Klip Drift. The vedettes of that force saw a huge cloud of dust in the distance and carried the news to Lord Kitchener, who assumed the general command. That energetic commander at once despatched his mounted infantry in pursuit, and sent Knox's Brigade along the nothern bank of the river to harass the right flank of the flying Boers, and to bring them to action if possible.

There were three drifts by which Cronje could cross the river on his way to Bloemfontein, and unless all these were held he might get across. He knew this as well as his pursuers, and all day kept back the pursuit of Knox and the mounted infantry by occupying every hill and kopje with a strong rear-guard, which had to be attacked and driven off, only to take up a position farther on. But with night approaching even Cronje felt that there must be a halt. He had marched twenty-four hours; the horses and the animals of the baggage waggons were alike utterly worn out; and, ignorant of the force that was pressing forward on the south bank, he believed that he would next morning be able to cross the river.

But he had not reckoned on the energy of the British commanders and on the endurance of their men. The mounted infantry had, when the fighting ceased, galloped back to Klip

Drift, crossed there, and, keeping along on the south side, seized the drift at Klip Kraal. Thither came Stevenson's Brigade; Colvile's Division, and the mounted infantry on their arrival went forward again and seized Paardeberg. Cronje moved early in the morning, and Knox marched along the northern bank to Klip Kraal. Cronje's scouts soon learned that the two drifts were in our possession, and made for the third, named Koodoosrand. But the exhausted animals were only equal to a short march, and Cronje, feeling confident that this drift was open to him, again halted before he reached it.

The delay was fatal to him Kitchener, as soon as he learned that Cronje was flying, had sent word to French, ordering him to move with all speed to endeavour to cut off the Boer retreat. The message arrived in the afternoon. The cavalry, in spite of the fatigue of the night before, had all been out with the town force endeavouring to drive the Boers from a strong position they held at Dronfield. The Boers, however, had stuck to it tenaciously, for by their occupation of the post they were enabling the force from Magersfontein with the guns to move round Kimberley and make for the north. They were, late in the afternoon, however, shelled out of their positions, and the weary troops returned to the town just as the messenger from Lord Kitchener arrived.

Not a moment's time was lost. An inspection of the horses was ordered, and it was found that of the five thousand that started from Klip Drift the morning before, two thousand at the utmost were in any way fit for further work. With this force, then, French started, after allowing a few hours' rest, before the long night ride. Utterly weary as the men were, they were inspired with fresh energy when they learned that they were going to cut off the retreat of Cronje. All through the night the march continued. Many horses fell dead, but there was no pause in the advance. The stars were shining brilliantly. Cronje's exact position was not known, and could only be guessed at, and Rimington, acting as guide, aimed for the Koodoosrand Drift. Morning found them still some distance away, for they had travelled slowly, most of the men marching all night in order to relieve their horses. An hour's halt, and then they moved on again. It was a terrible race, but it was won. About mid-day they reached Koodoosrand

Drift just as Cronje's advance guard were arriving on the top of the hills commanding it. The wearied horses were allowed a drink, and were then led away to a point where a dip would shelter them from rifle-fire, and the men took up their station to dispute the passage to the last.

It was plain that with these two thousand determined men the passage could not be forced, and Cronje's scouts brought him the news that the passage to Bloemfontein was barred. It was still open to him to abandon the waggons and guns and to ride north, but, believing that reinforcements would assuredly be sent to him, Cronje determined upon fighting. He had already abandoned seventy-four waggons, whose oxen could no longer draw them, at his last halting-place, and he now turned and marched to a flat plain between Paardeberg Drift and another lower down the river, still hoping to force his way across. It was only at the drifts that a passage was possible; the banks were high, and stood like walls on either side. Men on foot might have made their way down to the water, and might have climbed up the other side, but for mounted men, and still more for waggons, the river was absolutely impassable save at the drifts.

On all sides foes were gathering closely. The British infantry had accomplished marvellous marches. The Highland Brigade had marched from Jacobsdal to Klip Drift over soft sand, but, exhausted as they were, when called upon to continue their journey another twelve miles no murmur was heard. They had a terrible disaster to retrieve, and their longing to be engaged with the men who had mowed them down in the dark nerved them to further exertion. Behind them came Smith-Dorrien's Brigade, a splendid body of troops, the Shropshires, Cornwalls, and Canadians. These pushed across the river and took up their position on the north bank; Kelly-Kenny's Division was also there, and by morning Cronje had no longer the option of escape. He was fairly trapped. His position was, however, a strong one. The bushes along the river bank provided excellent cover for riflemen; while to the west, north, and east he was surrounded by a level plain some fifteen hundred yards in width, upon which the enemy would be exposed to a terrible fire from his men in and under the waggons that formed the laager.

CHAPTER XVIII

PAARDEBERG

HAD Lord Kitchener witnessed the battles of the Modder and Magersfontein, it is morally certain that he would not have attacked Cronje in his lair. But hitherto he had been engaged only with barbarous tribes, who, although magnificently brave, were either altogether without firearms, or were armed only with muskets of obsolete pattern. He was unable to form an idea of the tremendous effect of such rifles as those in the hands of the Boers, a race of marksmen. Nothing could have been gained by such an attack, even if successful, as the Boers must sooner or later have surrendered. Escape was impossible, and the troops could be trusted to give a good account of any force advancing to aid Cronje. Doubtless he was to some extent influenced by the burning desire on the part of his men and officers—who, with the exception of those of the Highland Brigade, had not as yet been engaged with the Boers—to get at the enemy.

However, on the following morning Knox's, Stevenson's, Smith-Dorrien's, and the Highland Brigades all advanced against the position. When within a thousand yards, a semicircle of fire flashed out from the waggons, as it had done from the bushes on the Modder. The effect was terrible, and men went down by the score before the hail of bullets, and the troops were forced, as the Guards had been on the Modder, to throw themselves down before it. It would have been well if, as on that occasion, the impossibility of success had been recognized, and the troops had been ordered to remain in the same position throughout the day, contenting themselves with returning the Boer fire. But no such order was given, and companies got up and made short rushes, each regiment burning to be the first to enter the Boer camp. Some little relief was afforded by four batteries of artillery, which kept up an incessant shell fire, distracting the Boers' attention, preventing their taking aim, and shaking their nerve.

At twelve o'clock one of French's horse-artillery batteries

came up and joined the others at the work. Splendid were the efforts made by many of the regiments to get to close quarters. The Canadians and Cornwalls—Smith-Dorrien's Brigade—on the one side swept almost up to the river bank, and the Welsh, Yorkshire, and Essex regiments did as well on the opposite side of the semicircle, both forcing the Boers to contract their lines, and limiting the space occupied by them.

The Highlanders did magnificently, burning to retrieve their defeat at Magersfontein, and showed that they had entirely recovered from the effects of that disaster. Their conduct was all the more worthy of admiration, inasmuch as they had marched over thirty miles, and only arrived on the scene just as the advance began. From the south side of the river a heavy rifle fire was maintained by the troops on that bank; and it is probable that some, at least, among the casualties on our side were inflicted by their bullets, which passed over the Boer camp. All day the fight continued, and all that had been effected was to contract the Boer position along the river bank from three miles to barely two. When evening fell, our troops were still in the positions they had won during the day. But the cost was out of all proportion to the advantage gained. They had suffered eleven hundred casualties. The Seaforths headed the list with one hundred and twenty, the Black Watch came next with ninety-six; ninety Yorkshires, the same number of West Riding Regiment, eighty among the Canadians, seventy-six Argyle and Sutherlands, fifty-six of the Cornwalls, forty-six of the Shropshires, and thirty-one of the Oxfordshires, showed how every regiment had taken its share in the fighting.

On the following day Cronje asked for twenty-four hours' armistice to enable him to bury his dead. Lord Kitchener assented, but as the morning wore on Lord Roberts arrived with Tucker's Division from Jacobsdal, and with three more field-batteries and five naval guns. The Commander-in-Chief disapproved altogether of the armistice, which was evidently a mere pretext to gain time; and he accordingly sent word to Cronje that the armistice was at an end, but that any women and children in the laager might come out, and would receive good treatment. This offer was declined by Cronje. His refusal was the signal for the guns to open, and all day a hail

of fire was poured into the Boer laager. Smith-Dorrien's Brigade was left on the ground that it had won, near the river-bank to the west; while one of Tucker's Brigades, commanded by Chermside, occupied the same position to the east. The remainder of the troops were drawn off and posted so as to prevent any portion of the beleaguered host from making their escape.

De Wet, with the force that had attacked and finally captured the train of waggons at Waterval Drift, had come round and surprised and captured a party of thirty men and four officers of Kitchener's Horse, who were posted on a kopje two miles away from the laager. The loss of this position was serious, because it opened the road to any Boer force marching to relieve Cronje. That such a force was approaching was known. Cronje had, when he found the passage at Koodoosrand blocked, flashed signals asking for aid, and not only would the local forces answer the appeal, but these would be largely reinforced by Orange Free State commandos coming with all haste from Natal by rail. Accordingly, five regiments of cavalry with four batteries were sent against the kopje, the force being divided into two parties of equal strength, and passing one on each side of the hill. A force of Boers they encountered were easily defeated, while the artillery drove off the defenders of the kopje, of whom some fifty were killed and as many taken prisoners.

Two days later another party approached. They attacked a kopje held by the Yorkshires but failed to capture it, and then tried to carry another hill held by the Buffs and were again defeated. In all eighty were taken prisoners. Every night Boers crept out from their laager and gave themselves up as prisoners, and by the end of the week we had six hundred captives. All this time the guns had thundered almost without cessation. From a balloon overhead signals were made as to the point at which the fire should be directed. Nothing could withstand this hail of iron. Scores of waggons were smashed up, oxen and horses killed by the hundred, but few Boers were visible. Holes and tunnels had been driven into the side of the numerous dongas that intersected the laager. Here the women and children were sheltered, and here the men crouched in readiness to sally out and defend the

laager if again attacked, and whenever our outposts were pushed forward the fire from their trenches was as heavy as ever.

At the extremity of the base of the semicircle Smith-Dorrien and Chermside's men had been steadily pushing forward trenches. On the night of Monday, February 26th, it was determined that the former should make an advance. The Canadians were to lead it, the Gordons to be in support, and the Shropshires to move to the left to protect the force from any attempt of the Boers to take them in flank. Two companies of the Canadians led the advance. The moon had not yet risen, and to keep their position each man grasped the sleeve of the man next to him. The rear rank carried spades and had their rifles slung behind them. The 7th Company of the Royal Engineers followed them carrying sacks full of earth. The distance to be traversed was eight hundred yards.

Never did men undertake more nervous work, for at any moment they might be swept by a storm of bullets such as had smitten the Highlanders at Magersfontein. Not a sound was heard until they were within fifty yards of the Boer trenches, and then the front rank struck against a wire on which empty meat-cans were stretched. A rifle-shot was fired as the clang rose, and the Canadians at once threw themselves on their faces. Scarcely had they done so when a roar of fire from a line six hundred yards long broke out. To move forward was impossible; the moon was on the point of rising, and its light would enable the Boers to pick them off unerringly. Accordingly the companies out on the plain were ordered to fall back in very open order, and this was effected with a comparatively small number of casualties.

The Canadians, however, now felt the benefit of the sacks of earth carried by the Engineers with them. These sacks were thrown down the instant the first shot was fired, and behind these the two companies of Canadians and the Engineers lay in comparative shelter. This protection was soon increased by the work of the men with shovels, and before day broke they were firmly established, and from their position were able to open a flanking fire upon the greater portion of the Boer trenches on that side. The other companies of the Canadians had similarly entrenched themselves

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CRONJE RIDES OUT TO SURRENDER

a short distance farther back, and all felt that the end of the ten days' investment was close at hand. The Boers also saw that to continue the struggle would result in their entire destruction, and at six in the morning a white flag was raised and Cronje himself rode out. He was met by General Pretyman and conducted by him to the head-quarters camp, where he met Lord Roberts, who shook hands with him. Cronje then said that he had come in to surrender. The general replied that the surrender must be unconditional. Cronje felt that in the desperate position in which he was placed he could not stand out for any conditions, but merely asked that his wife, grandson, secretary, and adjutant should, with his servants, be allowed to accompany him. This was granted, and he and those with him were the same afternoon sent down with the other prisoners, about four thousand in number, under a strong escort to the railway, by which they were taken down to Cape Town.

Only a hundred and fifty wounded were found in the camp, and, taking the usual proportion of killed and wounded, only some thirty or forty could have fallen victims to the tremendous bombardment to which they had been exposed for ten days, including those who fell during the attack on the 18th. The aspect of the prisoners was miserable to the last degree as, pallid, unwashed, unkempt, and ragged, they staggered up from the holes in which they had been lying, worn out by the terrible strain, sickened by the horrible odours that speedily drove back the soldiers who entered the camp, and must have been well-nigh insupportable even to nostrils accustomed to insanitary surroundings. Some were sullen and downcast, but among the majority the predominant feeling was evidently one of satisfaction at the end of their sufferings, and the fact that, as far as they were concerned, the fighting was over.

The scene in the camp was indeed terrible. Carcasses of dead animals lay everywhere, the greater part, owing to the heat of the sun, being in a state of decomposition. Waggons overturned, and sometimes smashed to pieces by the explosion of our shells, showed the destruction modern artillery can effect against material of all kinds, though it is comparatively harmless against troops when not in solid formation.

If the Boer prisoners had expected—as would assuredly have been the case had they been the victors — that the vanquished would be received with exultation and triumphant jeers, they were agreeably surprised. They had been brought up in the belief that the British soldier was at once contemptible as a fighter and full of every evil quality. They had already learned that he could fight; now they learned that he was a generous enemy, and that his imagined hatred of the Boer had no existence whatever. The patient endurance with which the besieged had supported the tremendous fire to which they had been subjected had filled the soldiers with admiration and pity for men forced by the iron will of their commander to maintain a resistance when there was no possibility of escape, and they crowded round the captives, offering them little kindnesses, helping the feeble, giving them tobacco and other little comforts from their own scanty stores, carrying the children, and assisting the women. There was no sign of exultation. They were justly proud of the success they had gained, but no show of this feeling was visible. As much honour was due to the British soldier for his bearing at the moment of victory as for the desperate courage and steadfast endurance he had displayed in trying to achieve it.

Yorke Harberton had been kept at work almost night and day from the time he reached Jacobsdal, carrying orders to the different columns and bringing back news of their position and progress. He would alternately ride his own horse and that which Mr. Chambers had given him, and when these required rest would use animals captured when Jacobsdal was taken. Although the excitement had kept him up, he was completely worn out when he arrived at head-quarters at Paardeberg. The other aides-de-camp were in a similar position, and Lord Roberts with his usual kindness told them that they must for a day or two consider themselves relieved from further duty, and that their work would be carried on by officers drawn from the cavalry. In spite of the thunder of the guns Yorke slept for nearly eighteen hours without waking, then, after a hearty meal, he rode round the line of investment, in order to ascertain the exact position of the various regiments and brigades, in case he should have to carry orders to them. But although after two

days' rest he returned to duty, there was little for him to do, as the position remained unchanged until the final advance of Smith-Dorrien's men.

The joy of the troops at the capture of Cronje and his host—who had left Magersfontein six thousand strong, and of whom only one thousand who had slunk away to their farms retained their liberty—was heightened by the fact that his surrender occurred on Majuba Day. This feeling was especially strong among the Colonial troops, who had hitherto been obliged to put up with the triumphant celebrations of that event by the Boers. This feeling was still further heightened by the receipt of the news that a day later Buller's army had relieved Ladysmith.

Not until March 6th, a week after the surrender, was there any movement. This pause had been absolutely necessary to rest the horses of the cavalry, which had been half-starved as well as terribly overworked. Accustomed to be fed at regular hours, these were unable to eke out the scanty rations served to them by cropping the dried-up and scanty grass of the veldt, and even at the end of the week were still scarcely fit for service. Thus no effort could be made to disperse the large force, consisting of local levies, commandos from Colesberg and other places south of the Orange River, and those that had hurried up from Natal, now all commanded by De Wet.

But in the meantime reinforcements had arrived — the Guards from Klip Drift, the Australians and the Burmese Mounted Infantry, a detachment of horse from Ceylon, the Imperial Yeomanry, and the City Imperial Volunteers, who had distinguished themselves in the attack on Jacobsdal, and were for all purposes of such warfare the equals of any of the line regiments. Indeed, the South African troops, the contingents from our colonies, and the volunteer companies which came out attached to the various line regiments, shattered to atoms the long-cherished belief of military men that civilians would be of no real service in warfare. In point of bravery, readiness to submit to discipline, and of cheerful endurance of fatigue and hardship, they proved themselves equal to their comrades of the regular army, and showed that enemies of Britain must not, in making an estimate of her strength,

omit from consideration the militia and volunteers, the mounted corps that would spring into existence, and the aid of her great colonies in case of need.

The position taken up by De Wet was a very strong one. In its centre was a farmhouse called Poplars Grove. On both flanks rose hills connected by scattered kopjes. Guns were placed on all the hills, and along the front ran trenches, rifle-pits, and barbed wire; and a direct attack would probably have proved at least as costly as Magersfontein. But Lord Roberts possessed what Lord Methuen had not—three brigades of mounted men and a strong force of horse-artillery. He had a number of guns greatly superior in weight of metal to those of the enemy, and an army of over thirty thousand men. But even with such a force he was not a man to throw away a single life unnecessarily, and therefore determined to turn the Boers' position. The cavalry were sent off before morning broke on March 7th to make a wide sweep, and come down upon the Boer line of retreat. Tucker's Division were to follow and support them. Kelly-Kenny was to push straight along the southern bank of the river, but he was not intended to attack until the cavalry and Tucker were in their appointed places. The Highland Brigade were on the north side of the river with the Naval Brigade, and these were to make a turning movement.

Had the plan been carried out as intended, the whole of the Boer force would probably have been annihilated and captured, and the war might have come to an abrupt end, for both Kruger and Steyn were with De Wet, and with the capture of the two originators of the war all further resistance might have ceased at once. But for once in his brilliant career French failed. Thus, instead of sweeping quite clear of the Boer line, he ran against the extreme left of their position. Daylight broke before the cavalry were perceived, and the instant the Boer leaders saw that they were in danger of being outflanked and their retreat cut off, they abandoned the position they had so laboriously fortified and retired hastily. But there was still ample time for the cavalry to have overtaken the guns and waggons, even if they could not have caught the flying horsemen. They allowed themselves, however, to be held in check by a handful of skirmishers, some fifty in number,

who first held a farmhouse, and, when driven from this, kept up a stinging fire from a low kopje, until, knowing that the guns and waggons were out of reach, and that the two presidents must have escaped, they retired.

Thus, for an hour this great body of cavalry and mounted men suffered themselves to be detained on their all-important journey by half a company of infantry. Such was not the method by which French had relieved Kimberley. Then he had disregarded the rifle and artillery fire of a vastly larger body of men, and had galloped straight on. His mission was to the full as important now, and yet he allowed himself to be detained for a precious hour, by which time the finest opportunity of the whole war was lost. General Roberts remarked when he heard of the utter failure of his plans, "In war you cannot expect everything to come out right. General French can afford to lose one leaf from his laurel wreath." Tucker's infantry had never fired a shot, and De Wet's little band had inflicted some fifty casualties among our cavalry.

Had a portion of the mounted infantry been sent forward on foot against them as soon as they opened fire, the matter would have been over in five minutes, and the loss would probably have been much smaller. The Boers, unmolested in their retreat, speedily rallied and took up a fresh position at Driefontein; and on the 9th, Lord Roberts again advanced. As before, De Wet had chosen his position well. It was some seven miles in length. The northern flank was protected by the river, the southern by a steep hill extending back for a long distance. The general's plan was the same as in the previous fight, namely, to outflank the enemy and cut off their retreat. For this purpose Tucker's Division, with a portion of the cavalry, were to make a wide circuit. The river prevented any flanking movement being attempted on that side.

General French was in command. The left wing was composed of Kelly-Kenny's Division, the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and a regiment of Mounted Infantry. He was to keep in touch with the centre, and not to push his attack home until Tucker had worked round to the rear of the position. But movements in the dark are always uncertain, and French, in endeavouring to keep touch with the centre, moved his men

more and more to the right, unknowing in the darkness that he was already ahead of that body. Thus, when he approached the Boer position, he was absolutely between it and the main body. Morning was breaking now, and Kelly-Kenny learned from a Boer farmer, who had doubtless been ordered by De Wet to give false information, that the hill in front had been abandoned. Therefore, he advanced until a storm of fire showed that he had been deceived.

The Welsh, who were the leading regiment, were staggered by the rain of bullets, and the Buffs passed them. So heavy was the fire to which they were exposed that every officer was hit, and, throwing themselves down, the men joined the Welsh in returning the fire of their unseen assailants. The men of the Essex regiment, who were next in order, pushed on, supported by the Yorkshires, and these with a cheer surged over the crest and fell upon its defenders, who were the Johannesburg Police, considered the best corps in the Boer army. It was composed of men of every nationality. They had been the terror and scourge of the town where they were supposed to keep order, and were, for the most part, unmitigated ruffians. They possessed, however, that fighting instinct that was absent among the Boers, a readiness to stand an attack, and they here suffered heavily for it.

The Essex men were among them with the bayonet, and drove them like chaff before the wind, leaving a hundred dead behind them. The moment the position was carried, the Boers quitted their whole line of defences and fled hastily. In point of the number of casualties the action was an insignificant one. Kelly-Kenny's Brigade had lost four hundred in killed and wounded, but they alone had been engaged. The turning movement had failed altogether, from some miscalculation in distance. The attack had begun long before Tucker and the cavalry had reached their appointed place, and, as before, the Boers were able to draw off their waggons and guns. Nevertheless, the consequences were of immense importance. The road to Bloemfontein was again open, and the Boers had learned that, however strong their position, they could not hope to oppose the British advance. From this time until the army marched into Pretoria they never again attempted to make an enduring stand, but

abandoned one after the other, without an attempt to defend them, the positions they had prepared, or rather had forced the Kaffirs to prepare for them with immense labour.

There was no delay after this success; the army swept forward, and on the 12th they were within striking distance of Bloemfontein. The cavalry pushed forward to the railway south of the town and cut it, while Major Hunter-Weston, with a handful of Mounted Infantry, started to cut the lines to the north of the town. The feat was a bold and difficult one. The night was extremely dark, but they succeeded in finding the railway and in blowing up a culvert, and returning in safety after having fought their way through a Boer force they encountered. This action was of immense service, as it prevented the escape of twenty-eight railway-engines, two hundred and fifty trucks, and a thousand tons of coal, which were all standing in readiness to start as soon as the British were seen advancing against the town. It is not too much to say, that had these trains escaped, Lord Roberts would have found it next to impossible to supply his army with provisions.

As the troops marched through Bloemfontein to the spot selected for their encampment, a mile or two outside the town, they were received with enthusiasm by the British portion of the population. Union-jacks waved from the windows, caps were thrown up, and women sobbed in their joy at their release from the long strain of nearly six months of Boer insolence and oppression. The general was met by a deputation headed by the mayor, the landdrost, and Mr. Fraser —the last-named being a Scotchman who had long been settled there, and had adopted the nationality of the Orange Free State. He had won the esteem of the Dutch population as well as that of the British, and had been run against Steyn for the presidentship. Had he succeeded, the Free State would never have thrown in its lot with the Transvaal, and would have been spared enormous sacrifices and financial ruin. He was thoroughly loyal to the country of his birth, and was appointed by Lord Roberts chief magistrate of Bloemfontein, while General Pretyman was named as its governor.

It was evident to all that there must be a long pause before the army could renew its advance. The single line of railway,

by which alone it must depend for getting up provisions and stores, was threatened along its whole length from the Orange River by the Boers, and indeed was at present almost completely in their hands. The bridges by which it crossed the Orange River at Norval's Pont on the branch to Port Elizabeth, and at Bethulie on the branch to East London, were known to have been blown up by De Wet when he was summoned to hasten to Cronje's assistance. Even when these had been repaired, and the Boers driven back from Springfontein and other points held by them, it was liable to be interrupted at any moment by small parties of the enemy, who would have the aid and shelter of farmhouses near the line.

The army was now cut off entirely from its base at De Aar, and it would be necessary not only to pass up supplies sufficient for its daily consumption, but to collect great magazines for its supply when it started on its march north. It was necessary, too, to fill up the gaps caused among the horses of the cavalry and the mules of the transport. No fewer than ten thousand had died or become utterly unfit for service during the month that had elapsed since the advance began from the Modder River, and even of those that remained, few would be able for some time to perform hard work. Considering the enormous difficulties in the way, it was wonderful that six weeks sufficed to complete the preparations for an advance.

Yorke's first step when the force arrived at Bloemfontein was to call upon Mr. von Rensburg. The latter expressed great satisfaction at seeing him again.

"I had every hope that you had got through safely, Mr. Harberton. For if you had not done so, we should certainly have heard of it here. Moreover, there came a story that three Boers had been strangely overpowered, and left tied up in a stable by two others, aided by a Kaffir. The two men had been recognized as spies by one of the party assaulted. The incident was considered as an extraordinary one, as taking place in the heart of a town occupied by the Boers, without any alarm being given. So far as was known their assailants had escaped. It was certain that the two spies had ridden quietly out of the town, and had been accompanied by the Kaffir. A hundred men started in pursuit along all the

roads leading west, but without success. I felt no doubt that you were the men engaged in the matter, and I heartily congratulate you."

"It was entirely due to you that we succeeded; your getting us that ride in the train down to Colesberg, and the permit, were of the greatest service to us, and we could hardly have crossed the river without them. Even as it was, it was a close thing, and it was the greatest piece of good fortune that we were able to get out of the town after the affair you speak of."

He then related how Dirck Jansen and his companions had been overcome and silenced.

"You Englishmen are quicker of thought and action than our people," von Rensburg said. "I am not astonished that in a sudden struggle like that, when both parties were equally surprised, you had the advantage. I shall be glad, if your duties permit, if you will take up your quarters here. I have no doubt that the Dutch rule in this place is at an end, and I shall be running no risk whatever in showing that I for one am well content that it should be so. The behaviour of your men as they marched through the town to-day was beyond all praise. They must have had a terrible time of it, for they all looked worn and haggard, and had evidently been doing desperately hard work on the smallest amount of food."

"Yes, it has been hard work, and our loss in horses and baggage animals has been enormous; still, we are all well satisfied. In a month from starting we have relieved Kimberley, captured Cronje and some five thousand of his men, driven De Wet out of two strong positions, and now occupy this town."

"I do not think you will have much more hard fighting, Mr. Harberton. The men who came in here yesterday, after being driven from their last position, were completely disheartened. They said they had been told that the Rooineks were cowards, but that there was no stopping them, and that your soldiers marched through a storm of bullets as if these had merely been hailstones."

As the Government House, of which Lord Roberts had taken possession, was close to Mr. von Rensburg's, Yorke had no difficulty in obtaining permission to stay there. The time

passed pleasantly for him; he had just enough work to do in riding out to the camps with orders, and in questioning farmers who had come in to take advantage of the proclamation that all who gave up their arms and took the oath of neutrality would be permitted to return to their farms and remain there unmolested. He had his friends of the 9th Lancers, and was always welcomed in the camps of the cavalry brigades. He was introduced by Mr. von Rensburg to several of the leading Dutch families, and passed many pleasant evenings among them. As the shops were still fairly supplied, the head-quarter mess was now comparatively luxurious, and altogether he was far less impatient than most of the other officers for the advance to commence.

Preparations for it had begun some time before, when Tucker's Division had captured Karee siding, some twenty miles north of the town; but not without considerable loss, for, as upon previous occasions, the infantry attacked before the cavalry had completed their turning movement. But on the 3rd of May all was ready for the advance. The troops were glad indeed, for while they were stationed at Bloemfontein a terrible foe had made its appearance among them. Enteric fever had broken out, the hospitals were filled to overflowing with sick men, and the accommodation was altogether insufficient to meet the emergency. For this no one could be blamed. The medical staff that had accompanied the movement from the Modder River was sufficient to cope with and care for any amount of wounded that were likely to be thrown on to their hands; but it was not capable of meeting such an emergency, even with the assistance of the hospitals that had been furnished and sent out by private subscription from home. All that could be done was done; but the first necessity was to provide for the wants of the fighting men, to accumulate the stores on which they would have to depend during their advance; and although many Red Cross trains came up, there was, for a considerable time, a grievous deficiency of hospital accommodation and hospital necessaries, doctors, and nurses.

In one hospital, where there were five hundred beds, there were seventeen hundred sick. Upwards of a thousand men died, but there were some seven thousand cases, and those who

recovered were so debilitated by the effects of the disease that they were unfit for further service, and had to be sent down to the Cape or Port Elizabeth, and then to England. The seeds of this terrible scourge had been sown by the polluted waters drunk at Paardeberg. By some grievous oversight the War Office had neglected the advice of those who urged upon it the necessity of sending out a special corps to attend to sanitary points. Had this recommendation been attended to, the lives of some four thousand or five thousand men, and of over twenty thousand sent home incapacitated for work, would have been saved.

Gatacre's force were able after De Wet's departure to move up to the Orange River, repairing the railway as they advanced. On arriving at Bethulie Bridge, the general found that, although that magnificent railway viaduct had been destroyed, the road bridge was still intact. It was known, however, to be mined, and there was a strong Boer force on the other side ready to blow it up the instant the British ventured upon it. It was saved, however, by the daring action of Lieutenant Popham of the Derbyshire Regiment, and of Captain Grant of the Sappers. The former, with two men, crept along the bridge at night and removed the detonators, took away the dynamite from under the farther span, and carried it off under a heavy fire, opened by the Boers as soon as they found that the mines were being tampered with. But there still remained heavy charges in the piers, and although the Boers could not explode these in the ordinary way, as they were commanded by our rifle-fire, they might have effected it by directing a shell-fire against them. Captain Grant, therefore, completed Popham's work by going across, removing the charges, and dropping them into the river. As the reconstruction of the railway-bridge was a work that would occupy months rather than weeks, the preservation of the road-bridge was a matter of vital importance. Gatacre's force marched across it after the enemy had been shelled out from their position on the other side, and advanced along the line of railway. The cavalry pushed forward to Springfontein, and there met two battalions of Guards sent down by train from Bloemfontein—and thus the whole line of railway was in our possession.

Clements, advancing from Colesberg, had thrown a pontoon

bridge across the river close to the ruined Norval's Pont, and thus, when a temporary deviation of the line had been effected, this branch of the railway was also available. Farther to the east, General Brabant, with a force of Colonial Volunteers, the Royal Scots, and three guns of field-artillery, advanced to Dordrecht, won a victory there, and pushed on so rapidly towards Aliwal that he occupied the bridge there before it could be blown up, and then proceeded to stamp out the rebellion in that part of Cape Colony. To the east of the line of railway, from Bethulie to Bloemfontein, strong bodies of the enemy continued to wander about doing considerable damage. But Lord Roberts was not to be tempted to move any considerable forces to suppress them. His great object was to march to Pretoria, his great work to collect stores that would enable him to do so, and to do this he contented himself with holding fast to the line of railway. Rails were often removed and culverts blown up, but a few hours' work always sufficed to repair the damage.

Two serious reverses, however, happened. A cavalry force had been threatened by a strong Boer commando at the waterworks that supplied Bloemfontein. They were twenty-four miles from the town. The Boers opened fire with heavy guns from a hill that commanded the British position. Colonel Broadwood, who was in command, could not, with a force composed only of mounted men, attempt to storm the hill, and as the guns of the two batteries of horse-artillery with him were altogether inferior to those of the Boers, he decided to retire upon Bloemfontein. He knew that a messenger he had sent the night before to ask for reinforcements had arrived there, and he received a reply that Colvile's Division would be sent out before daybreak to meet him. Believing, therefore, that there was no danger in front, he remained at the rear of the column, which had been shelled by the enemy.

The waggons were at the head of the retiring column, which, as it crossed the plain, had to go through a deep donga. Here the Boers were in hiding. Each waggon as it descended was silently seized. A Boer took the place of the driver, and it ascended the opposite side without any alarm being given. So the whole convoy would have fallen into the hands of the hidden enemy had not one of the troopers with

it drawn his pistol and fired. A volley of shots rang out, and the brave fellow paid for his courage with his life. The nine waggons which had not reached the donga halted. The two batteries were close behind them, and, knowing further concealment to be useless, the Boers sprang to their feet and opened a terrible fire on them. Men and horses went down in numbers. The confusion was terrible. The men struggled to get the fallen horses out of the traces, but were mown down by the continuous rain of bullets. The rearmost gun of the leading battery alone was able to get off, and galloped furiously back. Two guns of the second battery were overturned by the struggling horses and had to be abandoned. As soon as the others reached a distance of seven or eight hundred yards from the edge of the donga, they turned and opened fire.

Roberts's Horse had been abreast of the guns and suffered heavily also; but they, the New Zealanders, and the Burmese Horse dismounted when they had retired a sufficient distance, and, throwing themselves down, returned the fire of the Boers. Parties of cavalry were sent off to discover some other point at which the donga could be crossed, and one was found two miles to the south by an officer of Rimington's Scouts, and towards this the force moved off. The artillery nobly covered the retreat. But they had suffered terribly. Two of the guns had but two men left to work them, and another was loaded and fired by an officer single-handed; and when at last the order came to fall back, but ten men remained on their legs, and several of these were wounded. The Colonial corps covered the withdrawal by turns, and in two hours the rear of the column had crossed the donga. Some thirty officers and three hundred men were killed, wounded, or missing. A hundred waggons, with seven guns, were lost. Only one officer and the sergeant-major of the leading battery escaped.

The other disaster, which was equally serious, occurred four days later, when a detachment of five companies of infantry posted at Reddersburg were surrounded on their march from an advanced position, and took post on a kopje. For twenty-four hours they defended themselves gallantly. But they were without water, the hoped-for relief did not arrive, and they surrendered the next morning.

CHAPTER XIX

MAFEKING

ON the 20th of April, Yorke was sent for by Lord Roberts.

"I suppose you are almost tired of remaining quiet, Mr. Harberton?" he said with a smile.

"I shall certainly be glad when we are off, sir. But I am by no means sorry for a rest after being on horseback for six months. But I am perfectly ready to go anywhere if I can be of service."

"What do you say to a ride to Kimberley?"

"I am quite ready to go, sir; though I hope to be back with you when you advance."

Lord Roberts shook his head. "I hope to be away before you get back. I have some despatches for you to carry. The wires are so frequently cut by the Boers that I cannot trust to them in a matter of importance. They relate to an expedition that is being prepared for the relief of Mafeking. Lord Methuen is confronted by so strong a force of Boers—doubtless a portion of Cronje's force, which moved north with the guns—that he cannot go forward. Colonel Plumer in the north has not a sufficient force to fight his way in. Therefore profound secrecy is necessary with regard to the route of a force with which Lord Methuen and I hope to relieve the town. It is for this reason that I dare not trust to the wire. You have done good service, Mr. Harberton, and if you like I will attach you to the force, which will start in ten days or so. And if all goes well, you will be at Mafeking, and will have time to rejoin me, say at Johannesburg, before I advance on Pretoria. I cannot expect my progress to be very rapid, for although I do not anticipate any serious resistance on the part of the Boers, I shall have to make halts to enable the supplies to come up. And as the party you will go with will travel fast, I do not think that, if all goes well, you will be many days behind me at Johannesburg."

"Thank you very much, sir! If I cannot be with you, I should above all things like to be at the relief of Mafeking."

"The despatches will be ready for you this evening," the

general said. "You can start with them as early as you like. I hope that your usual good luck will again attend you."

Yorke bowed and retired. He had no doubt that Lord Roberts would, as before, turn the Boers out of their positions by flanking movements, and that if a great battle were fought, it would be close to Pretoria, and he felt delighted at the thought of being with an expedition which the general evidently believed was likely to effect the relief of Mafeking.

That town had, since the day of the declaration of war by the Boers, been a cause of no little anxiety. As time went on, and the garrison continued to defend themselves heroically, the feeling at home heightened, until every scrap of news that came through was regarded with as much interest as the more important operations of the army.

Mafeking was a small town, and was chiefly known in Britain as the place from which the Jameson raid had started. It was the nearest point of the western railway to Pretoria, and was within a few miles of the Transvaal frontier. Unlike Kimberley, it contained no garrison of regular troops, the force consisting only of three hundred and forty men of the Protectorate Regiment, one hundred and seventy Police, and two hundred Volunteers. But fortunately, early in July the military authorities at Cape Town had appointed Colonel Baden-Powell to organize a force of irregulars, both for the purpose of preventing any native rising in case of war, and as far as possible to defend the eastern border. The difficulty of such a task, owing to the extreme length of the frontier, had been recognized at once; and a better man could not have been chosen for the task. Baden-Powell had, a year before, taken a conspicuous part in the campaign against the Matabele; and before the outbreak began, had organized the Protectorate Regiment; while, under his orders, Colonel Plumer had raised a regiment in Rhodesia.

He saw that Mafeking was certain to be the first point of attack. It was but a hundred and fifty miles from Pretoria, and was the route through which the Boers would naturally pour into the colony, where the population was largely Dutch. He had chosen as his chief of staff Major Lord Edward Cecil, who arrived at the town on October 1, 1899, and set to work to prepare the town for defence, with

Captain Williams and Captain Fitz-Clarence, Lord Charles Bentinck, and other officers.

The military authorities had sent up a certain amount of stores. These were quite inadequate for the purpose, and Baden-Powell and Lord Cecil took upon themselves the responsibility of ordering far larger supplies to be forwarded. They might have failed in obtaining these had it not been for the patriotism of Messrs. Weil & Co., one of the largest firms in South Africa. These accepted the order, although quite aware that the prices of all goods were advancing enormously, and furnished the supplies asked for. And thus the store of provisions was accumulated that enabled Mafeking to hold out for so many months.

But the requisitions for guns was not so promptly complied with. The Africander government of Cape Colony, whose sympathies were wholly with the Transvaal, pretended to doubt that there was any probability of war, and refused to send up the guns, and when at the last moment half a dozen small pieces of artillery where forwarded, they arrived too late and were unable to enter the place.

On Baden-Powell's arrival he organized the town guard, consisting of all white inhabitants capable of carrying arms, and even boys of from fourteen to sixteen were formed into a cadet corps for orderly duty. An armoured train was constructed and armed with a Maxim and Nordenfeldt, and mines were laid in a circle round the town.

Already several large commandos of Boers had appeared on the frontier, and whatever might be the opinion elsewhere, at Mafeking there was no question whatever that these men were only waiting for the declaration of war by Kruger to attack the town. On the day after the expiration of the time named in Kruger's ultimatum the railway was torn up forty miles south of the town, and an armoured train, bringing two seven-pounders for Mafeking, was thrown off the rails, and an artillery fire opened upon it. The officer who, with twenty men, was escorting the train, defended himself valiantly for five hours, but was then obliged to surrender. This was the first blood shed in the war.

The Boers had doubtless expected to enter the town with scarce any resistance. They were five thousand in number,

and knew from their sympathizers in the place that, including the town guard, its defenders amounted to only nine hundred men, with two seven-pounder guns and six machine-guns. The difficulties of the besieged lay chiefly in the fact that Mafeking, though but a small town, was scattered over a very large area, and that the defences were naturally erected some distance outside the circuit. These defences were planned by Colonel Vyvyan and Major Panzera.

Two days after the declaration of war the Boers appeared before Mafeking, and drove in the pickets round the town. The armoured train and a squadron of the Protectorate Regiment went out and drove back the Boers. Great numbers of the enemy hurried up and cut off the party, but another squadron and a seven-pounder went out and opened a passage into the town. The loss was about two killed and fourteen wounded, while the Boers suffered much more heavily. Two days later the Boers opened fire on the town with two twelve-pounder guns, and in another four days Cronje sent in a messenger with the summons: "Surrender to avoid bloodshed"; to which Powell replied, "When is bloodshed going to begin?" Two or three days later the Boers brought up a ninety-six-pounder, and the bombardment began in earnest.

On the 27th a sortie was made; one of the Boer trenches was carried, the Boers were driven out with a loss of a hundred men, while we had six killed and eleven wounded. About half the Boers who fell were killed by the bayonet, and consequently this weapon was throughout the siege regarded with a wholesome dread by the besiegers. There were now, in addition to the ninety-six-pounder, five seven-pounders, one ten-pounder, and two twelve-pounders playing on the town, and yet the damage done was so slight that on the day after the sortie there was a concert at the hotel, the officers all attending in fighting costume, in readiness to rush out in case the Boers attacked.

Bomb-proof shelters were dug, everyone kept in good spirits, and Baden-Powell sent out the cheerful message, "All well. Four hours' bombardment; one dog killed." Another summons to surrender was answered with the message, "Tell General Cronje that I will let him know when we have had enough."

Two assaults were made, but they were both repulsed with

loss, although one of them was pushed with great energy against an old fort which was the key of our position. It was held by Colonel Walford and men of the South African Police. The attack was covered by the fire of four guns and the ninety-six-pounder. The Boers fought well, and pushed up to within three hundred yards of the little fort, but were repulsed with heavy loss. We had two officers, Captain the Hon. D. H. Marshall and Captain Pechell, among the six killed. Various skirmishes followed, but the siege languished until, on the 18th of November, Cronje left to take command of the force assembling to oppose the advance of Lord Methuen. Commandant Snyman succeeded to his post.

Things went on quietly until a great sortie was made on 26th December. The object was to attack a post called Game Tree Fort. The storming-party was composed of eighty men and six officers. Captain Vernon of the Protectorate Regiment was in command. Supported by a considerable force and by guns playing on the enemy to distract their attention, the storming-party dashed forward. Many fell as they advanced, but they pushed forward till they reached the fort, which was composed of sand-bags. These stood up like a wall, and no efforts of the men sufficed to enable them to scale it, whereas from loopholes left between the bags a murderous fire was maintained. Captains Vernon, Sandford, and Paton were killed, Captain Fitz-Clarence wounded, and Lieutenants Swinburne and Bridges alone escaped the deadly fire and led back the survivors of the little storming party. Twenty-one had fallen, and four of those carried off were found to be mortally wounded.

After this there was a long period of inaction. The bombardment was continued, Snyman, in spite of the protests of Baden-Powell, continuing to throw shells into the nunnery and the women's laager, until the colonel ordered a number of the Boer prisoners to be also confined there. Occasionally a message was got through, and, carefully as the provisions were doled out, the gallant commander at last informed General Roberts that by the 20th of May the stock would absolutely come to an end, and that he could not hold out beyond that date.

On 17th April, seeing that the force from Rhodesia under

Colonel Plumer was not sufficiently strong to fight its way through, and that the expedition that had been sent there by way of Beira could hardly, in spite of the tremendous exertions that were being made, be depended upon to join Plumer in time, Lord Roberts ordered that a flying column of mounted troops, under the command of Colonel Mahon of the 8th Hussars, should start from Kimberley not later than the 4th of May.

Yorke, after leaving Lord Roberts, at once returned to his quarters, and told his host that he was going to Kimberley, and should probably not return to Bloemfontein, but should rejoin the army on its way up the country.

"Are you going to take your man with you?"

"No, sir, I shall have to travel fast, and may have to ride for my life. I shall take my best horse. If you will kindly allow me to leave the other in your stable, my man can bring him on when the army moves."

"That I will gladly do, but you must let me lend you a better mount than the one you are taking. I have two in my stable of which you can take your choice. I think either of them is as good as any in the state—or, I should say, in the colony, as, since your general's proclamation, we are all British subjects."

"I could not think of accepting your kind offer, sir."

"But I insist upon it, Mr. Harberton. Indeed you will be doing me a service, for since the war began I have had no use for my horses at all, and they sadly want exercise. A month's hard work will be of real benefit to the animal; and I should benefit too, for time was when I did not mind how fiery a horse was, but now that I am getting on in life I am not fond of having to fight with my mount."

"I am extremely obliged to you, sir; but I do not see how I shall be able to send it back again to you."

"When you get to Johannesburg you can leave it with Mr. Chambers, he and I will arrange how it is to be returned. In fact, as soon as matters are settled down I shall certainly go there myself. Do not let that trouble you in any way."

Yorke gratefully accepted the offer. Both of his own horses had felt the hard work to which they had been subjected, that which Hans rode more than his own; for the

latter had been kept hard at work since their arrival at Bloemfontein, and was certainly not fit to start on a journey of many hundred miles. Both horses could, without difficulty, go on at the rate the army was likely to advance, especially after having another ten days' rest at Bloemfontein.

Hans and Peter were both disappointed when they heard that they were not to accompany Yorke. But Hans himself, who throughout had taken great care of the horses, admitted that these were not fit to start on so long a journey. Accordingly the next morning at daybreak Yorke started alone on the horse that had been lent to him. The distance between Bloemfontein and Kimberley was somewhat under a hundred miles, and this was traversed in two days, Yorke riding only forty miles the first day, as he felt that it would not do to push the animal too hard immediately after being so long without work. He did not hesitate to complete the remaining part of the journey on the second day, as he knew that the horse would have at least a week's rest before starting again. It was a splendid animal, superior even to that which had been killed at the time when he was taken prisoner on his way to Belmont, and as it stretched out in a gallop under him he felt that he could ride anywhere across country without fear of being overtaken by any party of Boers he might meet.

On his arrival at Kimberley he handed his despatches to Colonel Mahon, to whom he was instructed to deliver them if Lord Methuen was still at Boshof.

"I have brought despatches for you, sir," he said as he entered that officer's head-quarters. "Lord Roberts informed me that if, as he supposed, Lord Methuen was still at Boshof, I was to hand them to you, as they relate entirely to the force you are preparing. I have the honour to be one of the commander-in-chief's extra aides-de-camp. My name is Harberton."

"We have all heard of you, Mr. Harberton," the colonel said as he opened the despatches. "Your journey to Kimberley, and your adventurous escape from Pretoria, have made your name familiar to us all."

When he glanced through the despatches he said: "I am glad to see that you are to accompany me till we get to Mafeking. Our arrangements are going on most satisfac-

torily, and I have no doubt that we shall be in a position to start on the day named. Now, you must be famishing after your ride, though, I suppose, as an old hand, you did not leave Bloemfontein without some provision for the journey. I will tell my orderly to put your horse up at once. Dinner will be ready downstairs in half an hour; they always keep a table for me and my officers."

The dinner at the hotel bore few signs of the long siege. Supplies had been got up, and some of the principal inhabitants had returned, and though at Bloemfontein things had been well managed and comfortable, the style in which meals were served was very inferior to that which had already been attained at Kimberley. Some ten or twelve officers joined Colonel Mahon's party. No allusion whatever was made to the intended expedition, which was kept a profound secret, as even at Kimberley there were many Boer sympathizers, and it was all-important that no rumour of the approaching departure of a large body of horse should be known to them. It was to consist of the Imperial Light Horse, which had arrived from Natal, the Kimberley mounted corps, the Diamond Field Horse, a party of Imperial Yeomanry, and a detachment of the Cape Police, a horse-artillery battery with four guns and two machine-guns, a hundred men of the Fusiliers to guard the waggons, fifty-two waggons with ten mules each, and a number of spare horses to take the place of any that might break down. The force amounted in all to twelve hundred men. Not even to the officers who commanded the different corps was their destination made known until the morning of the 4th of May, when the force had ridden out from Kimberley.

Yorke had placed himself altogether under Colonel Mahon's orders, and had looked after many of the details connected with the waggons and provisions. The store of food carried was quite enough to last fourteen days, this being the outside limit of the time that the march was likely to occupy. Once off there was no delay. The mules and the waggons did their work well, and the force moved round to the west of the position of a large body of Boers, who were opposing Methuen's advance by the line of railway, and on the 9th marched into Vryburg, having done a hundred and twenty

miles in five days. They halted here for a day to rest the animals, and on the 11th they started again. Hitherto not a shot had been fired. From this point they were watched by the enemy, as their arrival at Vryburg had been at once notified to the Boers, and at Koodoosrand a force was found posted in a strong position in front of them.

Mahon, whose object was not to fight but to relieve Mafeking, moved off to the westward; but here the country was found to be thickly covered with bush, which greatly impeded the progress of the waggons, and presently the enemy, leaving their position, threw themselves across his path. There was a sharp but short encounter, and the Boers were soon in flight. The casualties in killed and wounded on our side were only thirty.

On the 15th the relieving column arrived at a village twenty miles to the west of Mafeking, where, within an hour of their entry, they were joined by Plumer's force, which had just been strengthened by the arrival of four twelve-pounder guns of the Canadian artillery, and a party of Queenslanders.

These troops had performed a marvellous march. On their arrival from Canada and Queensland respectively they had been brought round by ship to Beira, carried by train to the plateau of Rhodesia, from there in vehicles a hundred miles to Buluwayo, then by train over four hundred miles to Ootsi, and had then pushed on on foot for four days over terribly bad roads at the rate of twenty-five miles a day, and had been with Plumer only a few hours.

There was no fear now that they would fail to gain the success they had striven for, as their united force was stronger than that with which Snyman could oppose them. The Boer commander, however, would not retire without one last effort, and he planted his force on a hill which commanded the water-supply; but after he had held his ground for an hour, his guns were silenced, and he retired past Mafeking to the trenches on the eastern side. Here, however, the Boers had no rest, for Baden-Powell sallied out with his garrison, and Mahon's guns opened upon them, so that ere long they withdrew and retreated eastward.

Mafeking was free at last! Only six days before, fearing doubtless that relief would come ere long, and possibly hearing

that a large cavalry force was nearing Vryburg, the Boers made the most determined attempt to capture Mafeking that had occurred during the siege. Early on the morning of the 12th three hundred volunteers, under the command of Eloff, a grandson of Kruger, crept up to the west of the besiegers' line and reached the native quarters, to which they at once set fire. The barracks of the Protectorate Regiment were held by Hore and some twenty of his men. These, after a stout defence, were compelled to surrender. Two other positions within the line were captured, and had Snyman sent up his support at once, affairs might have ended badly; but this failed to arrive. The telephone and telegraph wires called up the defenders from all parts of the town. These gradually surrounded the positions the Boers had taken, and prevented any reinforcements from reaching them. Knowing that unless aided they must surrender in time, Baden-Powell refused to allow the loss of life that must ensue if the Boers were attacked, and contented himself with preventing them from being reinforced, and at seven in the evening Eloff, finding his position desperate, surrendered.

The defence of Mafeking ranks with that of Ladysmith in the stubbornness of the resistance which it, an open town, made against a powerful enemy, and is the more remarkable inasmuch as the garrison consisted entirely of irregulars, with but two or three guns of the smallest calibre, while the enemy had far more numerous and powerful artillery. For six months the little garrison had maintained an unflinching defence, during which time their spirits, and it may be said their gaiety, never flagged under any privation, hardship, or work.

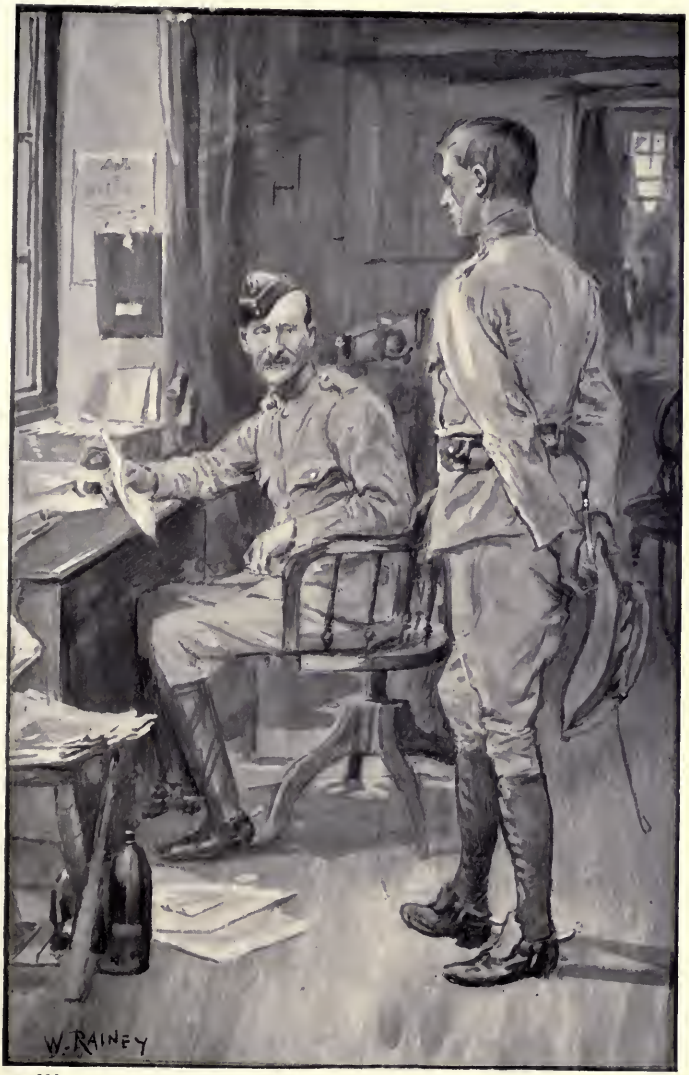
The service they rendered the country is beyond computation; for they had detained throughout the early months of the siege five thousand men, who would otherwise have been carrying fire and sword throughout the Colony, and causing a general rising among the Dutch population, who were only waiting for the fall of Mafeking and the arrival of their friends to take up arms. Pressed as the garrison had been, they were in better condition than the inhabitants of Ladysmith when that town was relieved. The arrangements had all been admirable. Horseflesh and horse-soup had been served out regularly. Oats had largely entered into the

rations. A certain allowance of oat flour was served out, and porridge was made from bran, by mixing the sifting of the husks with water, letting this stand for twenty-four hours until it became slightly sour, then boiling it for an hour, and leaving it to cool. The natives, who had an objection to the horse-flesh and horse-soup, were in the latter days of the siege fed wholly on this porridge.

Mafeking was relieved on the 18th of May. On the 20th, Snyman had informed the government at Pretoria that he had retired from before Mafeking on the arrival of a superior force. Thence it was telegraphed through Lourenço Marques to the Cape, thence flashed both to Lord Roberts at Kroonstad, and home, and in a few hours the English-speaking people throughout the whole of the British Empire joined in rejoicing at the safety of the heroic garrison.

Yorke that evening received from Baden-Powell a despatch giving an account of the incidents of the siege, and the capture of Commandant Eloff and his party. With this, and the despatches of Colonels Mahon and Plumer, he started at daybreak on the following morning. Uncertain as to the position of Lord Roberts, he kept close to the line by which the force had advanced, and on the afternoon of the fifth day rode into Boshof. He had taken with him provisions for the journey, a bag of oats for the horse, and a canvas bag of water. He was twice seen and chased by small parties of Boers, but, thanks to the excellence of his horse, he left them behind without difficulty. He travelled from daylight up till eleven o'clock, halted during the heat of the day, and at four started again and rode till dark, and by this means his horse was able to carry him without great effort.

He found that Lord Methuen, with the greater part of his force, had on the 12th moved forward, and that he had reached Hoopstad on the 17th. Kroonstad had been occupied by Lord Roberts on the 12th, and the force still at Boshof heard that a halt had been made there until the day before Yorke himself arrived at Boshof. The commander-in-chief had effected the passage of the Rhenoster River without fighting, the Boers having abandoned the strong position they had prepared, owing to their being threatened by the cavalry, who had crossed the river higher up.



M 839

YORKE RECEIVES A DESPATCH FROM BADEN-POWELL

After a rest of eighteen hours, Yorke started for Kroonstad. He scarcely saw a person during his long ride. The advance of Methuen to Hoopstad, and Roberts to Kroonstad, so alarmed the Boers that they had for the most part abandoned their farms and trekked north. The majority, however, of the men capable of bearing arms were with their commandos, and a few women only remained in the farmhouses. On the third day after leaving Boshof he arrived at Kroonstad. Here his work was practically over, and he was not sorry for it; for, excellent as his horse was, it was beginning to feel the terrible strain of the journey, having accomplished over four hundred miles in nine days, a performance that showed the strength and endurance of the horses of the lofty plateau of the Free State and the Transvaal.

A strong force was stationed at Kroonstad, which was now the base of the advancing army. Going at once to Lord Methuen, who had arrived there from Hoopstad two days before, Yorke obtained an order from him for carriage for himself and horse in a train that would start at midnight. He spent an hour relating to the general the adventures he had passed through since he had last seen him on the Modder.

"You must be well mounted indeed to have got down from Mafeking in nine days, Mr. Harberton. Of course, you might have done it in a great deal shorter time had you ridden direct from Mafeking here, though I quite understand that, knowing nothing of the commander-in-chief's movements, you could not well have attempted that, for you would have had to pass through a country we have not touched yet."

"Yes, sir, it would have been only about half the distance—probably, I should say, even less than that."

"Yes, much less. We only reckon it to be a hundred and fifty miles from here to Mafeking in a direct line. But, of course, carrying despatches you could not have risked that, especially as you would have had to cross the Vaal, and you may be sure that every drift on that river will be strongly guarded."

"I don't think I should have come much quicker, sir. For, according to my map, the country is a great deal rougher than that through which I have travelled; and as the Boers have not

been disturbed, I dared not have ridden by day, and could hardly have found my way by night; and there was no road marked, leading south-east from Mafeking, which is about the line that I must have followed. I knew, too, that Lord Roberts would have heard the news of the relief of Mafeking via Pretoria. Had it been otherwise, I should have risked the attempt, knowing the intense anxiety throughout the army and at home as to the safety of the garrison. As I was only carrying the details, two or three days' difference did not seem to me to be of importance. Had I travelled by that line, I could only have hoped to succeed by coming in disguise. I knew that Lord Roberts hoped to move from Bloemfontein two days after I left him, but there might have been fresh misfortunes like that at Sanna's Post. The line might have been cut in several places, and he might have been so delayed that he would not have been at Kroonstad by the time I arrived there. May I ask how far the general has got?"

"He crossed the Vaal to-day and bivouacked at Vereeniging. Generals French and Hutton, I believe, have moved on to Rietfontein, and General Ian Hamilton to Rietkuil."

"Then he has crossed the Vaal without opposition, sir?"

"Yes, the cavalry outflanked the enemy. False news had been spread as to the drifts by which they would cross, and the route they took completely surprised the Boers, who had all cleared off before the main army reached the river."

At twelve o'clock, Yorke took his place with his horse on a cattle truck, and the next day came up to the head-quarters, which had that morning arrived at the Klip River station, little over ten miles from Johannesburg. There he delivered his despatches to Lord Roberts, who, on hearing the route he had followed, complimented him warmly upon the rapidity with which he had made his journey.

"We have only heard the bare fact that Mafeking has been relieved. Were they at their last gasp?"

"It did not look like it, sir. I do not know what stores they had remaining, but I heard that they were pretty nearly out of everything except oats and horseflesh. The men certainly looked somewhat thin and worn, but by all accounts they had kept up their spirits wonderfully, and confidently relied upon succour arriving by the time we named."

"Did Mahon succeed in capturing any considerable force?"

"No, sir. There was a fight outside the town, but our guns were too strong for them, and they fell back to their entrenchments on the other side of the town. Colonel Baden-Powell attacked them there, but I think they only made a stand to get their big gun away. This they succeeded in doing, and only one small gun was captured. If the horses had been fresher, no doubt a heavy blow might have been dealt them, but they had had a very heavy march. Certainly the four Canadian guns could not have pursued them with any chance of coming up with them, especially as they had abandoned their waggons and stores; and Colonel Baden-Powell believes that they sent off the big gun the day before, and only fought their battle with us to give it time to get a long way on the road."

"It is a sort of conjuring trick," Lord Roberts said, with a smile. "Heigh-ho, presto! and the gun is gone. We have outmanœuvred them many times, but never once have we caught one of their big guns. Such cannon until the present war have been considered as simply guns of position and wholly out of the question in military operations in the field. I am sure I am much obliged to you for the zeal and activity that you have displayed, and shall have pleasure in mentioning your name most favourably in my despatches."

On leaving the general's tent, Yorke, to his great satisfaction, saw Hans standing near. "I saw you ride in, master, and glad I was, for one never knows what may happen."

"I am also glad to see you, Hans. I suppose Peter is here too?"

"Yes, sir, he is with the two horses; they are quite right again now. I didn't ride either of them coming up, so that they should be as fit as possible for work by the time you wanted them."

"I am glad to hear that, Hans, for this horse, good as it is, wants a fortnight's rest after the tremendously hard work it has done since I left you."

CHAPTER XX

JOHANNESBURG

THE difficulties of the advance were now past, the country was almost level beyond the drift station, and in the distance was a low line of hills on which tall chimneys could be made out, the chimneys of the mines, which had brought such wealth, not only to those who worked them, but to the Transvaal, and which, owing to the greed and avarice of Kruger and his associates, had finally brought ruin upon the country. So far the resistance of the Boers had been feeble in the extreme. From one point after another, carefully prepared in every way, they had retreated with scarce a show of resistance, and although they might nerve themselves to fight one battle in defence of their capital, it was certain that Johannesburg, a far more important town, would fall into the hands of the invaders without an effort.

Many of the Free State men had left the retreating forces of the Transvaal and remained in their own country. Although they had, through the malign influence of Steyn, thrown in their lot with their northern kindred, there had from the first been no real heartiness between the two sections, the Free State men declaring that they were sacrificed by the Transvaalers, that the whole brunt of the war had fallen upon them, that they were not consulted, and were treated rather as if they had been born servants of the Transvaalers than as men who had sacrificed everything for their sake. The Transvaal men, on the other hand, accused the burghers of the Free State of being half-hearted in the cause, of being backward in fighting, and not to be trusted, accusations which were certainly unfounded. The one desperate attempt, for the capture of Ladysmith, had been made by the Free State men, who had fought with greater courage and determination than the Transvaalers had ever done.

Their country had been made the theatre of war. It was their railways that had been destroyed, their property damaged, their farms burnt. They had been placed along the Modder

to bear the brunt of the British fire, while the Transvaalers had been posted in a comparatively safe position on the British flank. They, a civilized people, had been lorded over by one inferior to their foes in all respects except physical strength. It was small wonder that, seeing how all the assurances that they had received had been falsified, all their hopes disappointed, all their feelings outraged, they should have refused to go north to aid in the defence of the country which had done so little to aid them. The wonder rather is, that they did not retire altogether from the contest and accept the inevitable, when further resistance could but bring ruin upon them.

Advancing from the Klip River on the 29th, General Ian Hamilton found the enemy in considerable force with guns on a range of hills to the west. The position being too strong for cavalry to attack alone, two brigades of infantry were sent to their assistance; and the Gordons and the City Imperial Volunteers with the greatest gallantry stormed the heights. The fighting of the Boers here showed how great was their demoralization, there was no such resistance as that offered by the men who held the kopjes of Belmont and Graspan. The Gordons had nearly a hundred casualties, but this was caused to some extent by their advancing in open order in line without a pause; while the City Imperial Volunteers, who were exposed to an equally heavy fire, advanced by rushes, the companies in the rear keeping up a heavy fire against the Boers on the sky-line, and so shaking the accuracy of their fire.

Had the Gordons used similar tactics they would probably have suffered much less than they did. While this action was going on on their left flank, Henry with the mounted infantry moved straight upon Germiston, a point at which the lines from Natal and Johannesburg joined the main line to Pretoria. This junction lay among the great mounds of mine refuse; these were occupied by the Boers, and there was some sharp fighting, but the enemy were soon driven off in gallant fashion by the dismounted men. The feat was a daring one, as it was impossible to say how large a body of the enemy had been lying among the tips. The way being thus cleared, the main force advanced to Germiston.

The next day the 7th Division, with a brigade of cavalry and the mounted infantry, were established on the heights north of Johannesburg. Ian Hamilton's column was at Florida, three miles west of the town. French and Hutton lay between the two forces. During the day Dr. Krause, who had been left in temporary charge of Johannesburg, came out to the head-quarter camp and agreed to surrender the town on the following morning. Early on the 31st the formal surrender was made, and Lord Roberts entered the town at noon with two divisions. The Union-jack was hoisted with the same ceremony as had accompanied its unfurling at Bloemfontein. Lord Roberts remained there but a short time, and then rode out to the suburb of Orange Grove, three miles to the north of the town, which was left in charge of Wavell's Brigade, while Mackenzie of the Seaforth Highlanders was appointed military governor.

Lord Roberts had now a serious decision to make. The departure of the main army to the north had emboldened the Boers of the Orange Free State to undertake operations at several points against the line of communications. The speed at which the army had advanced had rendered it impossible for stores sufficient for their needs to be pushed up along the single line of railway, and at the utmost only a day's consumption for the army could be brought up in twenty-four hours. The army was therefore literally living from hand to mouth, and the blowing up of a single important culvert or small bridge that would even for one day arrest the transit of trains would have had the most serious consequences. Lord Roberts had therefore to decide whether to content himself for a short time with the capture of Johannesburg, until the safety of his communications was assured, and a supply for a farther advance accumulated, or to push forward at once to Pretoria.

He chose the latter alternative. Delay would enable the Boers to recover from the demoralization which the complete failure of all their elaborate plans for checking the advance had brought about, to clear Pretoria of its stores, and above all to carry off the British prisoners, some four thousand in number, with them. The latter was a very serious consideration, as the possession of so large a number of prisoners

might have been used by the Boers as a lever to extort more favourable terms than they could otherwise have looked for.

Yorke had ridden in with Lord Roberts's staff. As soon as the cheering that greeted the hoisting of the British flag had ceased, and the general was moving on, Yorke's eyes, as he looked round over the crowd, fell upon a group of familiar faces, and, turning, he rode up to them.

"You do not recognize me, Mr. Chambers?" he said, as he dismounted.

"Why, it is Harberton," the latter exclaimed. "No, we none of us recognized you, though we looked very narrowly at the mounted officers with the two divisions; but we did not think of seeing you on the general's staff. Besides, your uniform makes all the difference; you were a Dutch farmer, you know, when we saw you last. We are glad indeed to see you, as glad, I think, as to see the dear old flag hoisted."

While he was speaking, Yorke had shaken hands with him, his wife and daughters. "Now, of course, you are coming to us?" Mr. Chambers went on.

"I do not know what we are going to do at present, sir," Yorke replied; "I do not even know whether we shall stay in the town to-night. However, I will ask leave when the day's work is over, and I hope to be able to join you this evening, by which time I shall know something of what the movements are likely to be."

"And, of course, you will bring your two men with you?"

"With pleasure, sir. If I can manage to come, they will certainly be able to do so."

"Then we may expect you anyhow this evening?"

"Certainly; I have no doubt at all about getting away."

Yorke remounted his horse and rode after the general. General Roberts's quick eye had noticed him ride up to the party; he turned round when Yorke rejoined the staff, and motioned to him to come up to him.

"So you have found some friends, Harberton?"

"Yes, sir; they were Mr. Chambers and the family, the gentleman I was able to render some service to when his house was attacked."

"And I suppose he wanted you to go home with him?"

"He did ask me, sir, but of course I said that it was out of the question."

"I am going out to Orange Grove," the general went on, "and it will certainly be two or three days before we advance again. I don't know that I can do without your services altogether, Harberton, for there will be a good deal to be seen to, but I can certainly spare you now, and as long as I stay here it will be sufficient if you come at nine in the morning, and you will always be able to get away by five or six o'clock in the evening."

"Thank you very much indeed, sir!"

And Yorke rode back to the square. His friends were just taking their place in their carriage when he arrived, and were much pleased when he told them what the general had said. "I will follow you at once, Mr. Chambers, when I have found Hans; he and the Kaffir will be just behind. There, I can see him now, with the other orderlies and spare horses."

He rode at once to the party. Hans was riding one of the horses and the Kaffir was leading the other. "This way, Hans. We are to stop at Mr. Chambers's to-night; you know the way." The carriage had waited till he returned, and he rode by its side out to Parfontein.

"I thought you were on General Pole-Carew's staff, Mr. Harberton?"

"So I was, sir; but when Lord Roberts arrived the day after my return to camp, he took me as an extra aide-de-camp and interpreter, as Pole-Carew's Brigade was not coming on at the time."

"We were very anxious about you; but we had a letter from von Rensburg, telling us cautiously that our friends had arrived there safely, and had gone on by train to Colesberg. In a second letter, he said that there had been a fray in that town, and from the description, he believed that you and your men were concerned in it; but whoever it was, they had got away. That was the last we heard."

"We did get off safely," Yorke said, "and made our way up to the Modder, and then went on with the general. Of course we were at Paardeberg and at the entry into Bloemfontein. Then I was sent up to Mafeking with the relieving column, with whom I entered the town. I started again that

night with despatches giving particulars as to the siege and our march. As you may imagine I did not let the grass grow under my feet, as I was most anxious to rejoin the army before it arrived here. It was a close thing, for I only overtook it at Klip River station three days ago. You have had no more trouble here, I hope, sir?"

"None at all; we have not heard of the matter since. Not only were the three fellows here sent away, but we gave such information that those who got away in the carts were arrested in the course of the day and all five were together sent down to Portuguese territory, so that the mouths of all who knew anything of the gold here were effectually silenced."

"I am very glad to hear that, sir. I have all along feared that the men who escaped might have got together another band and renewed the attempt."

"They would not have caught us napping again, for I arranged, as I told you I should do, for three of the engineers to sleep in the house. I had intended to move into the town; but when I found that all those fellows had been sent away, I had no longer any anxiety."

"Do you think there will be any more fighting before we get to Pretoria, sir?"

"There may be some fighting, but nothing serious. The Boers who came through the town in their retreat were perfectly disheartened; they abused their commanders, declared that they had been grossly deceived, and that it was of no use trying to stop the Rooineks, for that they would not attack them in the positions they had fortified, but went round at the sides, and they were obliged to retreat at once to save their guns and waggons."

By this time they arrived at the house.

"That is not the horse you rode when you were here," Mr. Chambers remarked as they alighted.

"No, sir; Mr. von Rensburg, when I started for Kimberley on my way to Mafeking, insisted on lending me this horse, as both of my own were worn out by the work they had had. It is a splendid animal, and has carried me nobly, as you may imagine when I tell you that, after a very rapid march from Kimberley to Mafeking, I started early the next morning and rode down to Boshof and then up to

Kroonstad, a distance of over four hundred miles, in less than nine days. He said that I was to ask you to take care of it until there was an opportunity of sending it down to Bloemfontein, or until he came up here, which he was going to do as soon as the roads were open."

"That I will do willingly. I dare say I shall hear from him now that the line is open again, and it will be possible to send letters."

They now sat down to lunch, and after the meal Yorke gave the details of his journey down, and of the struggle in the yard of the inn at Colesberg.

"That was a fortunate escape indeed," Mr. Chambers said, "and wonderfully well managed."

"I can't think how you do such things," Mrs. Chambers remarked. "You do not look more than eighteen, and yet you seem to be as cool, and as quick in deciding what is best to be done, as if you had been employed in dangerous work for many years."

"I don't think age makes much difference, Mrs. Chambers," Yorke laughed. "The games that one plays at school make one quick. A fellow sends down a ball at your wicket, and while it is on its way, which is not much above a second, you have to decide what to do with it, whether you will block it, or drive it, or cut it to leg. It is the same with football, and at boxing or single-stick you have to guard a blow and return it before, as one would imagine, you had time to think. In fact, you don't know yourself that you think. I should say that a fellow is quicker and cooler when he leaves school or college than he can be years afterwards, when he has altogether got out of the way of using his wits in a hurry."

After talking for an hour Yorke walked up with Mr. Chambers to the engine-houses.

"I hope we shall be getting to work soon," the latter said.

"I am afraid it will be some time before you do," Yorke replied. "The country is still in a very disturbed state all down the line, and one may almost say as far as Cape Town; and I am afraid that it will be a long time before the Boers accept their defeat as final, and that they will carry on a partisan war for many months. It will be impossible to guard every foot of line for nearly a thousand miles, and it will be

constantly cut. As they are all mounted, there will be no overtaking the raiding parties with infantry, and we have nothing like enough cavalry to police such an enormous extent of country. It will take a long time, I should think many months, before we shall be able on the single line of railway to do more than feed the troops, and until all resistance is crushed out it does not seem to me to be possible for the fugitives to return."

"Well, we must wait as patiently as may be. I am glad to see, by the news that we have received through Lourenço Marques, that our shareholders in England have neither lost heart nor patience, and that the fall in the value of stocks and mines has been much smaller than might have been expected. I own that I have had great fears of late that the Boers would, when they saw matters going against them, smash up the machinery and blow up the mines as far as they could. There was great danger of it at one time, and indeed yesterday I feared the worst. The rabble of the town, encouraged by Judge Koch, seemed bent upon violence; Botha and his troops had retired, and there was no authority whatever to keep order. Dr. Krause did all he could, and when a mob, composed almost entirely of the lowest class of Irish and Germans, went out to the Robinson mine the prospect looked desperate. But Mr. Tucker, the manager, showed great tact and firmness; and he was well backed by Krause, who pointed out to the mob that if the British troops when they entered to-day found that the mines had been damaged, they would probably have the whole of the lower portion of the town burned, and every man who could not prove that he had taken no part in the affair shot; and therefore, as there was everything to lose and nothing to gain by the destruction of the mines, it would be nothing short of madness for them to commit so useless a piece of mischief.

"Happily he succeeded, and the mob returned to the town, and there is nothing to prevent us from going to work again as soon as we can get hands. Of course the mine has been somewhat damaged by our picking out all the richest deposits during the last month's working; but as I have no doubt I shall be able to get a few hands, as many men have remained here, to drive headings and open new ground, I do not suppose

that there will be any falling off in our output when we once set to work in earnest."

That evening, after the ladies had retired, Mr. Chambers said: "Now, as to yourself, Yorke. From what you said, I fancy you do not think of remaining in the army after this affair is over?"

"No, sir. Owing to the death vacancies, I am now senior second lieutenant of the 9th Lancers, and might get my step any day. But the pay even of a first lieutenant will go but a very short way towards the expenses of a subaltern in a crack cavalry regiment, and even if I changed into the infantry, I could still hardly make ends meet. I came out here, as I frankly told you, in order to make money. My father's income as a clergyman will die with him; and above all things I am anxious to be able to assure the future of my mother and sisters."

"That you can do at present," Mr. Chambers said quietly.

Yorke looked at him in surprise.

"You do not suppose," the director went on, "that such services as you rendered to the company, and to myself and family, are to be passed over as if they had never occurred. I had taken all possible precautions to ensure the safety of the treasure, but I do not say that they would have sufficed had those twelve men had possession of the house for forty-eight hours. When they found that they could not bale out the water, they would naturally have supposed that it was fed from the cistern, or the pipe from the mine. They would have found out the latter, and by turning on the kitchen tap could have emptied the former; then they could have baled out the water and got at the top of the safe. They would have had trouble with it, but among desperadoes of that kind, and especially in a mining district, there would be sure to be several who would understand the use of dynamite; at any rate, sooner or later they would have blown it open and got at the gold.

"I have written a letter to the directors at home, saying that you have saved two hundred and fifty thousand pounds worth of gold in an attack made upon the house by a band of ruffians, with the connivance of my three male servants, who were cognizant of the existence of the store. I have recom-

mended that at least five per cent of the sum thus saved to the shareholders shall be voted to you, a recommendation which I have no doubt whatever will be granted; especially as the very existence of this money is still unknown to them, as I have not ventured to say a word in my letters concerning it, because all of them were liable to be opened by the Boer authorities. I should say that if they are at all liberally inclined they will vote you a larger percentage; but at five per cent the sum would amount to twelve thousand five hundred pounds, which will, you see, enable you to ensure the future of those dear to you."

Yorke was silent with astonishment for half a minute, and then said earnestly: "It is too much, sir; it would be out of all reason. I had no thought of doing more than saving yourself and the ladies from those ruffians, and no thought of reward ever entered my head."

"That may be, Mr Harberton, but that is no reason whatever against your accepting the money that you have fairly earned. It is not what you feel about it, but what the shareholders and I—as I am a very considerable shareholder myself —feel in the matter. There will be nearly two hundred and forty thousand pounds to divide between us—a sum wholly unexpected by them, and saved for them by you. It is a matter of only the barest justice, and I am sure they will feel as I do. I have, of course, written a full account of the affair — how, although an escaped prisoner and in danger every moment of detection, you went out of your way on hearing of this plot to hasten here; how you in the first place overpowered and disarmed my treacherous servants, and then warned me; how you and your two men killed no fewer than ten out of the twelve men who attacked us; and how without your interposition the ruffians would unquestionably have killed me, my wife, and daughters, before ransacking the place for the treasure—a matter, by the way, that would have been a considerable inconvenience, to put it in no stronger form, to the company, as they would have found it difficult to replace me by anyone having at once so intimate a knowledge of the mine and so large an interest in its success.

"And now we come to my personal interest in the matter. I wish to make you an offer. I have no son, nor have I a

nephew nor any near relative who could stand to me in the place of one. I propose, therefore, that you shall be trained up to take my place, so to speak, to act here as my assistant, to learn the business thoroughly, for which you would have ample opportunities, as I am inspector of several other mines, in which I have also interests. When matters have quite settled down, which may not be for another year or so, you can act as my *locum-tenens*, for I shall certainly go to England with my family for two or three years. I may return again for a year or so, and shall then finally retire. By that time you will be fully competent to fill my place here as managing director, and I shall transfer enough shares in the company to you to qualify you for the post.

"This is no new idea on my part. I have for some months past been thinking over returning to settle in England, but I have seen no way of doing so without seriously inconveniencing the company. I now see a way by which it can be managed. I have spoken of my plans to my wife, and she most cordially approves of them, and it now only awaits your decision. I may say that I hold twenty thousand shares in the company, and that I consider that as managing director you ought to hold at least five thousand, and that number I shall transfer to your name. I am perfectly confident that you will do full justice to my choice of you as my successor here, and you will not be long in acquiring the necessary knowledge. I shall regard you as an adopted son if you will allow me to do so, and I can answer that my wife and daughters will gladly accept you in that position. I may tell you that you will not be entirely cut off from your family, as you will be able to take three months' holiday every year if you like to do so, which will give you over six weeks at home, and perhaps you may bring one of your sisters out with you to keep house until you marry. What do you say to this?"

"I don't know what to say, sir; your kindness is so great I hardly feel that I can take advantage of it."

"My dear lad, place yourself in my position for a moment. Imagine that there had been a plot to kill your father and mother and two sisters, and that that plot failed by the interposition of a stranger. What would you have felt towards that man? Is there anything that you would not do for him? And

if you had been a rich man, as I am, would you not have felt that the gift of five thousand shares—which originally cost me five shillings each, although they are now worth more than as many pounds—would have been an inadequate expression of your gratitude?"

Yorke was silent, and after a moment's pause Mr. Chambers went on:

"You must think of us as well as of yourself. It will be a grievous disappointment to us if you refuse. Even in a pecuniary sense, I consider that my offer to you is an advantageous one to my family. My stake in this mine and others is a very large one; every penny that I have is invested in this way. At the present value of shares they are worth over three hundred thousand pounds. It would be an enormous advantage to have here a gentleman on the accuracy of whose reports I could implicitly rely, and who would, which is not always the case with managers of mines, frankly say if the prospects of any of them were falling off or improving. It is my personal knowledge of the real state of things that has enabled me to do so well—to get out of mines whose prospects are not favourable, and buy into others, perhaps at very low prices, likely to do really well when fully opened. I should not, of course, wish to obtain reports other than those sent by you to the boards of the various companies, but from what I personally know of the mines I should be able to draw very valuable deductions from those reports, and see the drift of them much better than men wholly in ignorance of the workings to which they relate."

"You need say no more, Mr. Chambers," Yorke said; "I accept most gratefully your splendid offer, and will endeavour to make myself worthy of it. But I hope that you will allow me to attend to my present duties until, at least, we have captured Pretoria. I could not in honour go to Lord Roberts and say that on the eve of possibly a great battle I desire to resign my commission. The war may continue in a partisan struggle for months, or even for years; but with Pretoria once taken it seems to me that there must be an end to fighting on a great scale, and that I might therefore, without feeling that I could be blamed for doing so, leave the army."

"By all means, Yorke; for, now that you have agreed to my

proposal, I can henceforth call you so. If it had been a matter even of months I could have waited, but I believe that it is one of days only. There may be a great battle, for, insignificant as has been the resistance of the Boers to your advance, it is difficult to believe that, with the example of what Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking have done, all unprepared as they were, they can retire from a town that they have for the past four or five years been fortifying."

"It is hard to believe that they could be so cowardly, sir, especially as they would know that a lengthened resistance here would enable the Burghers of both states to rally, and by cutting the line of communications speedily reduce the besiegers to the greatest straits; and indeed, even if they could only hold out for a week, the position of the army would become extremely serious. One thing is certain, that if they do not fight there they will never fight with any chance of success again. They may cut off convoys, blow up culverts, and harass us terribly, but it will no longer be a war, but merely the efforts of bands of mounted bandits."

"Now we will join the ladies," Mr. Chambers said.

"My dear," he said when he entered the room, "you will be glad to hear that Yorke has accepted our proposal."

"I am glad indeed," Mrs. Chambers said, shaking Yorke warmly by the hand. "I began to think that we should never be able to get away from here, and now I feel that there is a prospect some day of our doing so. My husband would never have gone until he felt sure that he could leave everything in the hands of one whom he could absolutely trust. Girls, you will, I am sure, be glad to know that henceforth Mr. Harberton will stand almost in the position of a brother to you. You have often lamented that you had no brother; I don't think you could have had one whom you could have liked better, certainly not one who could have done more for you. And now, in another year we shall be able to go home, as you have always wished to do."

The girls both looked greatly pleased.

"I am glad, Mr. Harberton," the elder said. "We both feel how much we owe to you; and if you will let us, I am sure we shall both, as mother says, come to look upon you as a brother."

"It is very kind of you to say so," Yorke said; "and as

a beginning, I hope you will in future call me by my Christian name. I hate being called Mr. Harberton."

"It will be much pleasanter calling you Yorke," the girl said; "and, of course, you must call us Dora and Mary. And it will be so nice, when we go to England, to meet your father, and mother, and sisters. Of course we have many acquaintances there among father's business friends, but it will be pleasant meeting people who can be real friends, and can talk about something else than mines, and levels, and reserves, and money."

"I have a bit of news to tell you, Hans, which I think will please you and Peter," Yorke said when, later in the evening, he went out to have a talk with them.

"What is that, master?"

"I am going to stay out here, Hans; and to be assistant to Mr. Chambers on the mine."

"That is good news indeed, Master Yorke. Then you are not going to be a soldier any more?"

"Only till we get to Pretoria, then I am going to resign my commission and come back here."

"And are you going to live in this house, master?"

"Yes, it has been arranged so, Hans; and that you shall take the place of the man we tied up, that is, you will have charge of the stables; and Peter will be there too, unless he makes up his mind to join his tribe again."

"I shall not do that, baas, as long as you will keep me. Some day I will go down and buy a wife, and build a little house near here. I have been so long in towns that I do not want to be a wild fellow again, and live in village kraals, and eat mealies, and have nothing to do but to walk about and carry a gun on my shoulder. A stupid life that; much rather live with baas."

The army remained but two days at Johannesburg, when, supplies having arrived, on the 3rd of June an advance was made to Leeuwkop, a distance of twelve miles. On the morning after the arrival at Johannesburg, Major Weston, with two hundred Lancers, had started to endeavour to damage the line of railway between Pretoria and Komati Poort, so as to cut off the retreat of the Boers, but they came across a strong body of the enemy, and were forced to retire, after having

suffered nineteen casualties. French, with a portion of the cavalry, started on the 2nd, made a wide sweep round to the west of Pretoria, and, after repulsing an attack by a strong force, established himself to the north of the town. On the 4th the main army advanced. The Boers for a short time held the river called Six Miles Spruit, but they were soon driven off. Some guns opened to check the pursuit, but our batteries were brought up, and speedily silenced them.

The Boers, however, menaced the flank as it advanced; and Ian Hamilton's Division, which was marching to the left of the main body, moved against them, and they fell back to Pretoria. As the army approached the town, a heavy rifle fire was for a time opened from a ridge on which stood the great southern fort. But as the latter remained silent, it was evident that its guns had been already withdrawn, and that the opposing force was but a rear-guard posted to check our advance while the town was evacuated. This and the field-guns that supported it were soon driven off. Pole-Carew's Division, which had now come up, swept over the slopes; the forts were found to be abandoned, and the goal of the long march lay defenceless before them. Here a halt was made for the night.

After dusk, an officer with a flag of truce was sent in from the Mounted Infantry, who had taken up their post within a mile of the town, to demand its surrender. No reply was given; but at ten in the evening the military secretary to Commandant-general Botha, with another general, brought in a letter proposing an armistice. Lord Roberts answered that surrender must be unconditional, and that an answer must be sent in before five in the morning, as the troops had been ordered to advance at daybreak. Before the time named, on the 5th of June, Botha sent in to say that he was not prepared to defend the place further, and that he entrusted the women, children, and property to our protection. The troops at once moved up close to the town, and at three o'clock Lord Roberts arrived at the head of two divisions.

The British flag was hoisted, and the troops marched past. The general established his head-quarters at the British Agency. The 15th Brigade was told off to garrison the town, Major-general Maxwell being appointed military governor. A hundred and fifty-eight officers and over three thousand men

were found in the prisons, but nine hundred had been carried off by the Boers in their retreat. Orders were given that these released prisoners should at once be reclothed and armed, and sent down to form part of the force guarding the line of railway.

Mr. Kruger had fled before the arrival of the British army, and showed, by leaving his wife behind him, as also did General Botha, that he had no belief whatever in the atrocious calumnies the former had invented regarding the conduct of our troops. Before leaving, Kruger carried off the money in the banks, and the state treasure, and did not even pay the officials the salaries due to them. After all his boasting, that if the British ever entered Pretoria they would find him sitting in front of his house, his despicable conduct when danger approached was only what was to be expected from a man whose folly and ambition had brought ruin on the people over whom he ruled, and who had trusted him only too blindly.

CHAPTER XXI

SETTLED

ALTHOUGH Pretoria was taken, Yorke felt that he could not as yet offer his resignation. The position was still a serious one. Botha had retreated but fifteen miles away, and had taken up an extremely strong position, with fifteen thousand men under his command. The line of railway ran through it, and from this he could obtain supplies from his rear, and, if need be, send off heavy guns and stores. The army of General Roberts had dwindled as it advanced. Garrisons had had to be left at the bridges and important stations. A brigade garrisoned Johannesburg, and another Pretoria. The disease which had played such havoc at Bloemfontein had accompanied the army, and had thinned its ranks. He had but fifteen thousand men available for striking his blow, and the cavalry horses were again almost unfit for service.

In the Orange River Colony De Wet had some eight thousand or ten thousand mounted men under him, and was raiding the whole country, capturing towns and threatening lines of railway. The bright side of the picture was that Buller was now advancing, and might soon be expected to clear out the Boers opposed to him, enter the Transvaal, and relieve the pressure. On the 7th came the news that De Wet, with two thousand men, had cut the line of railway and telegraph to the north of Kroonstad. Fortunately, sufficient supplies had been found in the town to enable the army to subsist for a few days. Had Botha retreated to a greater distance, Lord Roberts would have waited, as he had done at Bloemfontein, for remounts, reinforcements, and stores. But with an enemy so strong, and able at any moment to take the offensive, the general felt that measures must be taken without delay to drive him away from the neighbourhood, and accordingly he went out with the troops on the 10th, and next morning attacked the Boers.

The position held by the enemy was on a long range of hills that could only be turned with extreme difficulty, and the cavalry were not in a condition to execute so extensive a movement. French, with two brigades and Hutton's Mounted Infantry, was to work round to the north-east of the enemy's position. Two other cavalry brigades under Broadwood, with Ian Hamilton's column, were to advance on the right. No attack was to be made on the centre, as the position there was so extremely strong that it would be impossible to carry it without great loss of life. As it turned out, the Boers had posted but a small force there, having determined upon adopting our tactics and falling upon both our flanks while we were engaged in an attack on their centre. Both armies, therefore, unknown to each other, massed a great force upon each flank.

The two cavalry columns first came into action with the enemy. French found himself speedily met by so formidable a force that he was unable with the two thousand men under him to move forward. He was attacked in front, rear, and flank. The country was altogether too broken for the action of calvary, and his men, therefore, fought dismounted and in open order, and, aided by the three horse-artillery batteries, they kept the enemy at a distance all day. Unable to advance,

however, French made no attempt to retreat, knowing that, unless he held fast, the Boers would be able to throw their whole strength against the other wing, which, as could be heard by the distant firing, was hotly engaged. Night came on before the firing ceased, and the wearied men slept where they lay, and, renewing the fight in the morning, maintained their position all day.

On the other flank, Broadwood had been equally hotly engaged, and with difficulty held his own, being hardly pressed by a heavy artillery fire from front and left, while on his right rear a Boer commando attacked him fiercely. This force was with difficulty kept back by the fire of a battery of Royal Artillery, the same battery which had suffered so heavily at Sanna's Post; but as these assailants retired, another commando came up and pressed them hotly. These were charged in gallant style by the 12th Lancers, who, though their horses were weak, fairly rode over the mounted Boers and drove them to flight. The guns were saved, but when, after the charge, the cavalry re-formed, they were swept by a storm of bullets from the Boer marksmen. Lord Airlie, their colonel, with two officers and seventeen men, were killed or wounded, the former being shot through the heart.

Another threatened attack was repulsed by the Life Guards, and for a time the force was exposed only to the fire of the enemy's artillery. Hamilton's Infantry came up to the support of the brigade. As it was now late, Lord Roberts determined to postpone the general attack until the next morning. Although they had gained some ground, the day's fighting had not been attended with much valuable result, except that Lord Roberts had now thoroughly ascertained the nature of the Boer position, and had determined upon the point against which the decisive assault must be made the next day. This point was Diamond Hill. In the morning the Guards Brigade with two Naval twelve-pounders reinforced Hamilton, and its commander was ordered to move against Diamond Hill, and then down towards the railway to threaten the line of retreat should the Boers maintain themselves in other positions. Hamilton told off one of the cavalry brigades, with an infantry battalion, to guard his right rear, and the other brigade, with some mounted infantry, to cover his right flank, while with

the Sussex and Derbyshire regiments, and the City Imperial Volunteers and the field-battery, he advanced about mid-day against the Boer position.

He was met by a heavy fire on both flanks, and a continuous infantry fire from the hill in front. The infantry moved steadily forward, with the Guards Brigade in close support behind, and by two o'clock the position was carried, the Boers falling back to a hill covering the railway. After two hours' fighting, the infantry won their way to the crest of the new position. Here they were exposed to a terrible fire, and with difficulty maintained their position. The Boer guns pounded their line, while a heavy rifle fire swept them with a storm of lead, and there was nothing to be done but to lie still and return the fire as best they could until aid came up. Meanwhile the artillerymen were working with might and main to get the guns up the precipitous hill. One battery at last succeeded, and although the men fell fast, the guns were unlimbered and opened fire upon the enemy's batteries. Not, however, until two other batteries had been got up the hill and brought into action did the combat become equal, and as the afternoon wore on, the accuracy with which our shrapnel burst began to keep down the Boer fire.

General Roberts decided that it was too late to undertake further offensive movements over unknown ground, and made his disposition for a final advance on the following morning. When day dawned, however, it was found that the enemy had withdrawn. The cavalry set out in pursuit, without much hope of success, as their wearied horses were scarce able to carry the weight of their riders and equipments. A hundred West Australians, however, better mounted perhaps than the rest of the cavalry, and more lightly equipped, followed the enemy up for twenty-five miles, and gained a kopje near which the Boers were retreating. As long as their ammunition lasted they kept up a constant fire, killing a number of men and horses. It was singular that this punishment was inflicted upon the Boers at the very spot where they had treacherously surprised and massacred a British regiment on the march nineteen years before.

On the day after the victory the army marched back to Pretoria, having freed itself from the danger of immediate

attack. The railway communications were now restored. Lord Methuen, on the 11th of June, attacked and defeated the commando of De Wet, and the garrisons along the line were materially strengthened. Buller, while the engagement at Diamond Hill had been going on, had, by some severe fighting, defeated the Boers posted on a strong position at Aliwal's Nek, and the same evening established his head-quarters at Joubert's farm, four miles north of Volksrust, the border town of the Transvaal.

Yorke had been busily engaged during the two days' battle, and had had several narrow escapes from the enemy's shot. Twice, before the guns were brought to the crest, he had made his way up the hill on foot to ascertain how matters were going there. A ball had passed through his helmet, and another smashed his field-glasses. He was, however, untouched, and when the day was over, he felt that he could now resign his commission without any appearance of want of zeal. When, therefore, General Roberts sent for him in the morning, after their return to Pretoria, he determined to speak to him at once.

"I have called you, Mr. Harberton, to tell you that I have just heard of another vacancy in your regiment, which will give you your step. I congratulate you upon it heartily, and I only wish that it had been from lieutenant to captain, in which case I should have pleasure in warmly recommending you for a brevet majority."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, and your kindness makes it all the harder for me to say what is in my mind. I am desirous of resigning my commission. I only accepted it for service during the war, and although the war is not yet over, its end appears so near at hand that I feel that my object in resigning my commission will not be misinterpreted. You may remember, sir, that, when I had the honour of relating to you the story of my escape from prison here, I mentioned to you that I had been able to render some service to Mr. Chambers, the managing director of the Parfontein mine. I saw him as I passed through Bloemfontein, and he has been good enough to offer me a post as his assistant, which is likely to lead to great advantages. He will himself be returning to England with his family when things have quieted down, and is anxious

that I should go to him as soon as possible in order that he may give me such instructions as will enable him to leave matters in my hands while he is away. I had in no case thought of remaining in the army, as I have no private means, and came out here to make my way in business. I should certainly have preferred to stay on until the end of the campaign, but the offer made me is so advantageous, that I am anxious to avail myself of it."

"Quite right, Harberton!" the general said. "You have already shown that you possess all the qualifications required in an officer of the army, but it might be a long time before you had again such opportunities as those of which you have so brilliantly availed yourself during this war. I think your decision is a very wise one. You have done your share, and more than your share, in the events of the war, and have very markedly distinguished yourself. It shows that you have as much common sense as courage and quickness in making such a decision. Many a young officer, if he had gained as much credit as you, would have had his head turned, and refused even the most dazzling offer, with the result that years afterwards, when living in the dull monotony of a garrison town, he might bitterly regret having thrown away so valuable a chance. Personally, I cannot accept your resignation, but I can give you leave of absence until your name appears in the *Gazette;* and I do so all the more willingly as it is likely that we shall have a halt here of some weeks before we can obtain remounts and reinforcements. In sending home my despatches, which I shall do in the course of a day or two, I shall certainly mention you as having performed exceptionally brilliant service. Should you, while I am at Pretoria, have occasion to come here, I shall at all times be glad to see you. I suppose your servant will also want his discharge?"

"If you please, sir; he is still, I suppose, on the books of the Cape Town Rifles. He was not transferred to the Lancers."

Again thanking Lord Roberts for his kindness, Yorke retired, and half an hour later started with Hans and Peter for Johannesburg, where they arrived that afternoon.

"Welcome back!" Mr. Chambers said as he came out on hearing them ride up. "We have been thinking about you

very anxiously since we heard that there had been a two-days' battle and very hard fighting, and knew that as an aide-de-camp you would be galloping about with orders in the very thick of it."

"It was pretty tough work," Yorke said, "and, as you see, my helmet and field-glasses have suffered, but I had not even a scratch."

"Thank God for that! Are you here on duty, or have you come for good?"

"I am here for good, sir. I sent in my resignation this morning, and Lord Roberts has given me leave of absence until it appears in the *Gazette*, which will, of course, be some time hence, as letters will have to go and return, and they do not hurry things at Pall Mall."

"That is good news indeed. We shall all be delighted to have you here; and you must look upon our home as your home now, you know."

On the following morning Yorke went into the town and ordered civilian clothes for himself and Hans, and bought a suitable attire for Peter, and on his return began work by descending the mine with Mr. Chambers. He threw himself into the work with his usual energy, and during the next two months paid a visit to every mine in the neighbourhood, Mr. Chambers explaining to him the run of the lodes, the reason why every level and heading was driven, the steps to be taken for extending work and endeavouring to discover other lodes. Before descending, Mr. Chambers showed him the plan of the workings, so that he could the better understand them when he went below. When not so engaged he was instructed in the nature of the books kept, and of the duties performed by the various officials of the mines.

"You will understand, Yorke, that the question of driving levels and carrying on the working is in the hands of the underground manager, and is always discussed with me prior to any new steps being taken, but this matter is not really difficult. It is only on locating fresh lodes, determining their value, and how they had best be worked, that geological knowledge is much required. The discovery is first made by men thoroughly acquainted with the country. After determining

that the nature of the ground is favourable, they sink a small shaft twenty or thirty feet deep on the lode. The samples are taken to the assaye office in the town, and the proportion of gold to a ton ascertained there. The assaye value is always considerably larger than it will turn out on actual working, as much fine gold is lost in stamping and other processes, though the greatest care is exercised. Still, if the assaye product is, say, three ounces to the ton, it may be safely calculated that the actual working will yield at least two and a half ounces. However, you will not have to deal with this question. You have a well-established mine on a fine lode, and it would be difficult to make any serious mistake."

In the meantime scarcely a day had passed without news of fighting in the south, attended by varied fortune. De Wet, in spite of his rapid movements, had not been able to seriously injure the railway, and had several times been met and sharply repulsed; but, on the other hand, Delarey had gained a success at Nitral's Nek, eighteen miles west of Pretoria; and Grobler had cut up some cavalry to the north of the town, while twenty miles away a body of troops of the 19th Brigade had been very roughly used on the same day. On the 16th of July Botha took the offensive and endeavoured to carry the British positions round Pretoria, but was repulsed with considerable loss. There had been a good deal of fighting farther west, and also near Rustenburg. In August the area of resistance became still more extensive and active, for Lord Roberts was accumulating as large a force as possible at Pretoria to clear the main Boer army off the railway leading to Delagoa Bay, and the forces elsewhere were necessarily decreased.

One evening early in August Yorke, after dinner, went out to the harness-room as usual to have a talk with Hans, and smoke a pipe by the bright fire that was always maintained there during the hard weather.

"There is something I have to tell you, Master Yorke," Hans said. "Peter came back from the town ten minutes ago. He went in at two o'clock, and I had begun to wonder what he was doing there so long. He tells me that this afternoon he saw Dirck Jansen, and the two men who were with him in that affair at Colesberg, in the street."

"He did, Hans? Then we must be on the look-out. Dirck

can be here for no good purpose; and I should not be surprised if he has come to carry out his old grudge against me; though how he can tell that I am here is more than I can imagine. Of course they were together?"

"No; they were not far apart, but as they passed each other they neither spoke nor looked as if they were acquainted. They were not dressed as usual. Peter says Dirck was got up like a town Dutchman, and the other two like Uitlander workmen. I don't suppose we should have recognized the two men, though I should know Dirck anywhere. But Peter, like all the natives, never seems to forget a face he has once seen, and he is positive about them."

"I wish he had come back and told me at once, Hans. I don't know what I could have done, but I certainly should have had him arrested, because he is a British subject and a rebel, and we are in a position to show that he was actually in arms against us. He can have no protection papers to show that he had permission to return to his farm, and he would have great difficulty in explaining what he was doing here. At any rate, I could have got him a term of imprisonment, though I do not know that that would be much good; it would only add one more to what he considers his grievances against me. As to the other two men, I could do nothing; they are probably Orange River Colony men, and being unarmed and conducting themselves peaceably, could scarcely be arrested. Still, I wonder Peter did not come straight back. Bring him in here, Hans; I should like to question him myself.

"Sit down, Peter, and go on with your pipe," Yorke said when the Kaffir came in. "So you saw Jansen and the two men who were with him at Colesberg in the streets this afternoon?"

"Yes, baas."

"And they were not together, and did not seem to notice each other?"

"That is just so, master."

"I wonder that you did not come and tell me at once!"

"I knew you were out with Baas Chambers. You rode away just before I started."

"So I did, Peter; I forgot that. We did not get back till

just before dinner. I remember now that I rather wondered that Hans came and took our horses instead of you."

"As I knew you were away," the Kaffir went on, "I said to myself: 'No use going home. Better see what these fellows are here for; they are bad men. Dirck Jansen hates Baas Yorke; must look after him.' I had no fear they would know me, they only see me a little time; one Kaffir boy just like another, they never give me a thought. I watch and watch. Dirck went twice into a bar and had drinks; the others went in once, but never together. At six o'clock they all went to railway-station; I go there too. You know every evening one train runs to Pretoria. They all take tickets and get in, but not sit together. If I had had money in my pocket I would have gone too; but you know I never carry money, so that if I smell spirit, and want to break my promise, I can't do it. So, as I could not go with them, I thought it best to come here and tell you about it, then you can settle what is best thing to do. It not safe for you, baas, now this fellow about. Peter remembers his face when he saw you in that yard. He hates you, and would kill you whenever he had the chance."

"That is certainly so, Peter. No doubt they have gone to Pretoria to find me. They may have found out, from questioning men who have been taken prisoners, that I was on General Roberts's staff. Soldiers might not know me, but officers would know my name, and Dirck is crafty enough to get the information he requires. I must think over what had best be done."

He sat for four or five minutes looking into the fire.

"It is clear," he said at last, "that I cannot sit quiet and let him hunt me down. He would have no difficulty about finding me. He would only have to go up to a staff-officer and say simply that he was an old acquaintance of mine and wished to see me, and he would be told at once that I had left the army and was here with Mr. Chambers; then he would only have to wait to get a shot at me. This time he would choose a hiding-place so close to the road that he could not miss me. We must hunt him down while he is tracking me, and the sooner we set about it the better. We must ride over, Hans, there is only that one train that takes passengers."

"I will start to-night, baas," Peter said. "Only thirty

miles. I will sleep till twelve o'clock and shall be there by seven. What time you get there?"

"I shall set out directly after breakfast, say at nine o'clock, and, riding fast, shall reach Pretoria at twelve. I shall, of course, put up at the hotel in which I stopped when I was with the army."

"I will be there, baas. Perhaps I find him before that. He sure to go to street near generals, that is the place to meet officers."

"Very good, Peter; I think now that we can reckon on catching him before he catches me. He does not know that he is being hunted; we know that he is hunting us That gives us a tremendous advantage. But we must not be in too great a hurry; he is a deep fellow, and may be here on some other business. If so, he will probably finish that before he returns to Johannesburg. At any rate, we will watch him until we see what his game is. You will have to do this principally, Peter, for of course he knows both Hans and myself."

"I will watch him, baas. I will take my old clothes with me to-night, so that I can change them when I like. He might notice me if he saw me often near him in same clothes."

"That is a very good idea, Peter. Now, I don't know that I have any further instructions to give you."

Joining Mr. Chambers, Yorke told him what had happened and what he proposed to do."

"I think your plan a very good one. As you say, I have no doubt his chief aim in coming here is to endeavour to find you out and kill you. If that were his only object, I should say go straight to the head of the police, who is, I suppose, the provost-marshal, and have him arrested at once. But he may also be here to communicate with disaffected inhabitants. The Boers may intend making another attack upon Pretoria, and if they could arrange that at the same time there should be a rising there, and perhaps houses fired in different places so as to distract the attention of the garrison, it would certainly have a greater chance of success. Therefore, by all means carry out your plan. It would be best to say nothing about it to the ladies, it would only alarm them,

and they would worry all the time you are away. I will say at breakfast that you are going to ride over to Pretoria on business, and may remain there for some days. I will mention at the same time that I am anxious to know when it is probable that we shall be able to get a few of the miners up from the Cape or Natal, so as to clear up and make preparations for a start. They will then suppose that your visit to Pretoria is in connection with that."

This was carried out, and Yorke and Hans started early the next morning, Mr. Chambers having arranged to have two of the engineers to sleep in the house during their absence. Peter met them as they rode into the yard of the hotel.

"Well, Peter, any news?"

"Yes, baas; at nine o'clock he came in front of the church. I did not see him come, I was strolling about, but just at nine o'clock I caught sight of him. He walked up and down. I say to myself, 'He waiting for those other men'. But presently a man in the uniform of a Transvaal artilleryman came along. He say something to Dirck, Dirck say one word in reply, then follow him. They walk some distance; of course, I follow; at last they go into small house half a mile from the place. They stop there two hours, then Dirck came out alone. He looked very satisfied. He walked half a mile, then met the other two men. They talked very earnest, and all seem pleased, then they separated. Dirck walked away again and went to another small house quarter of mile away, and I come to meet baas."

"Very good, Peter; it is clear that Dirck has some other business in view than that of seeking for me. I shall go and see the officer in charge of the police arrangements at once. As I know him personally, I can talk the matter over with him more comfortably than if it were a merely official business."

On sending in his card to the provost-marshal Yorke was at once admitted.

"So you are back again at Pretoria, Mr. Harberton?" the officer said as he entered. "Is it business or pleasure?"

"Business, and not of a pleasant nature. I should have come to you later to lay the matter before you, and ask you to arrest a man who, I believe, has come here for the purpose

of taking my life; but this morning I have made a discovery that seems to show that the object of his visit here is of greater public interest than is my safety."

"Let me have the whole story, Mr. Harberton," the officer said; "there is nothing like getting at the bottom of affairs."

Yorke gave a short sketch of his previous experience with Dirck Jansen, and how his Kaffir boy had met him with the two men who had been overpowered by him at Colesberg.

"That certainly looks as if he had come here with the intention of avenging himself upon you, Mr. Harberton, and it was well indeed that your man recognized him. What you have told me is amply sufficient for me to order his immediate arrest as a notorious rebel."

"Yes, sir, and that is what I intended to ask you to do. But the case seems to me entirely changed by what my Kaffir found out this morning, and seems to show that he is here on a more serious business." And he then told him all Peter had noticed; how he met, evidently by appointment, an officer in the uniform of the Transvaal artillery, and of their long conference together.

"That is indeed serious, Mr. Harberton," the officer said after taking a note of Yorke's report. "Did the Kaffir say anything about the personal appearance of this officer? A score of them are in the town on parole."

Yorke repeated the account he had obtained from Peter of the man's appearance, and the address of the house they went to.

"That settles it," the officer said. "The man is Lieutenant Hans Cordua, a German. We are already watching him, and I am surprised that I have not already a report of this interview. We have received information from a man who is trusted by them that a plot is in progress, the object of which is to get up a sudden rising in the town, set fire to houses in various quarters, kidnap General Roberts in the confusion, and murder all the officers as they issue from their houses. We know that Botha has been in communication with him, and has been asked to bring up a large force close to the town on the night when the affair is to take place; and I have no doubt that this man, who is evidently a fanatic, is here in reference to the arrangements. I am only waiting

until I hear that a definite date has been fixed upon, to arrest Cordua and the other leaders of the affair.

"It is a desperate scheme, but might, had we not heard of it, have been attended with some success. It has not advanced very far as yet—that is, the leaders have not yet taken any steps to excite this rising. They may consider that this could be done in a very few hours; there are certainly three or four thousand men in the town who would be likely to join heartily in such an enterprise. About half these are Dutch, the others low-class Germans, Irish, and French. They are all against us: in the first place, from an intense hatred of us; and in the second place, because the stoppage of the mines, the cessation of all trade, and the departure of all the employers of labour, together with the dearth of provisions, have deprived them of the casual employment upon which they subsisted.

"A few of them are working-men in the true sense of the term, and certainly a good many were employed upon the railroads and in the various railway yards. These men are ripe for anything in the way of mischief, and if a whisper were passed round but a few hours before the rising is to take place they would join to a man. Our discoveries at present are a profound secret, though, of course, the military commandant and the adjutant-general have been informed of them, and we are to have a consultation at the commandant's this afternoon. The news you have brought, that an emissary from without has arrived last night, and has had an interview with Cordua to-day, will probably precipitate matters, and I should not be surprised if Cordua and those concerned are arrested this evening. It would be as well that your men should continue their watch over this fellow Dirck Jansen, and I should be glad if you will return here at six o'clock, as you may be required to identify him."

"I would rather not appear in the matter personally if it can be avoided, because, badly as he has turned out, he is, as I told you, a nephew of my cousin's wife.

"I will take care that you shall not do so more than is absolutely necessary. The evidence of your man, that he is a farmer from the neighbourhood of Richmond, and notorious for his pro-Boer feelings, and that he was with the rebels at

Colesberg, would probably be sufficient, corroborated, as it would be as to the latter portion, by your Kaffir, who could also prove that he met Cordua by appointment, and went with him to his house. He would probably not attempt to deny these points, and would find it hard to give any explanation of his present visit here. Of course, if he brought any document from Botha, we may find it when Cordua's lodging is searched. If not, he probably will get off with a few months' imprisonment as a notorious rebel."

"Very well, sir, I will call again at six o'clock."

Peter went on watch again, and just before Yorke was about to call on the provost-marshal, met him with the news that Dirck had been hanging about head-quarters, had addressed a staff-officer who came out, and that the latter had taken out a pocket-book, written a few words upon a page, torn it out, and given it to Dirck. When Peter left him he had just entered a small German beer-shop a hundred yards away.

When Yorke entered the provost-marshal's room the latter said: "We are going to make the arrest in half an hour's time, Mr. Harberton. We are agreed that the crisis might at any moment come to a head, and that although, now that we are forewarned, we could doubtless suppress the rising, it could only be done at the cost of a good deal of bloodshed, and the destruction of a vast amount of property by fire. Have you any news from your boy?"

"Yes, sir, the Kaffir has been watching him all day. He has had no communication with anyone, except that he accosted a staff-officer, and the latter wrote a few words on a piece of paper and gave it him. That, I have no question, was my address, and bears out my idea that he came here with the two-fold object of arranging about this plot and the time when it was to be carried out, and to satisfy his desire for vengeance upon myself."

"Well, we will put a stop to both these matters this evening. I will send six men with an officer to seize him at this café, if he remains there. At the same time, the parties will start to arrest the others; they have been watched all day, and we know where to lay hands upon them. The arrests must be made simultaneously, for the others would fly at once if they heard that any one of their fellow conspirators

had been taken prisoner. As you do not wish to appear in the affair, your man had better accompany the party to this café, if he is still there, to point him out to the soldiers."

"Thank you, sir! I sent my Kaffir boy back to the beer-shop, and Hans has gone with him; he will at once bring me news here if he comes out. But I should hardly think that he will be likely to do so—unless, of course, he has an appointment with Cordua later—as, when a Boer sits down to drink, he generally makes an evening of it. However, I will go down now and bring Hans here to lead the party of soldiers."

Half an hour later several parties of soldiers, each accompanied by an officer, started from the police station. Hans joined the one that was to arrest Dirck, Yorke followed at a short distance. Hans entered the beer saloon with the officer, and, pointing to Dirck, said, "That is the man, sir."

"I arrest you, Dirck Jansen," the officer said, "on the charge of being a rebel, who has borne arms against our troops, and of now being concerned in a conspiracy to effect a rising in this town."

Dirck leapt to his feet with a fierce oath; but the officer, warned of the desperate character of the man, had given orders to the soldiers who accompanied him, and two rifles were levelled at him. With another curse Dirck said, "I surrender."

"There is a pistol in the fellow's jacket," the officer said. "Just search his pockets, sergeant."

The latter did so, as Dirck remained silent and sullen, and a loaded revolver was produced from his pocket. "Now, put the prisoner in the centre of the squad, sergeant; he is to be marched to the prison at once."

As they came along past the spot where Yorke was standing, some forty yards away, Dirck recognized him by the light of a shop window close by. He uttered a hoarse shout of rage, snatched a knife that was hidden in his trousers-belt, burst through the soldiers, and rushed at Yorke. The latter was unarmed, but he stood still, bracing himself to meet the attack. Dirck was within six feet of him when three shots rang out. The officer had used his revolver, and two of the men their rifles. All three bullets took effect, and Dirck fell dead at Yorke's feet.

"That was a narrow escape," the officer said. "I am sorry we had to shoot him, for we might have got some information from him. However, it will save trouble. Bring him along, men; his clothes will all have to be carefully searched."

The body was taken in the first place to the provost-marshal's office and there searched, but nothing was found upon him save a small piece of paper, on which, as Yorke had suspected, were only the words, "Mr. Harberton, with Mr. Chambers, Parfontein Mine".

"Now you can go back and sleep in peace, Mr. Harberton," the provost-marshal said. "He nearly had his revenge at the last moment, for Mr. Williams reported to me that he was within a couple of yards of you, and that, had he and the soldiers not fired, your life would have been sacrificed."

"It might have been, sir, but I fancy I could have caught his wrist. As I told you, I have got the better of him twice, and I think I might have managed him a third time; but it is just as well not to have had to try it. Anyhow, I am heartily glad he has met his end, for I felt I should always be in danger as long as he lived, as he was not a man who would ever forgive what he considered an injury."

The following morning Yorke returned to Johannesburg.

"What! back so soon, Yorke?" Mr. Chambers said as he entered the house.

"Yes, the business is finished. There was a plot to carry off Lord Roberts, fire the town, and kill all the officers. Dirck was mixed up in it. He was arrested, and, seeing me, tried to kill me, but the guard from whom he broke away shot him just in time, so there is no more trouble to be feared from him. The other heads of the conspiracy were arrested in the evening, so I hope all danger of that sort is at an end."

At last all was ready for the general advance. Lord Kitchener had been almost ubiquitous for the past three months, and wherever the situation was grave he was certain to make his appearance, and by his masterly arrangements set matters straight. The work of chasing De Wet and Delarey had been steadily maintained, and although by swift and constant turnings they had evaded their pursuers, they had at least been prevented from seriously interfering with the railway, and keeping reinforcements of men, and remounts for the cavalry, and stores,

from arriving at Johannesburg. Buller had been advancing steadily north, fighting almost incessantly, and was reinforced by Lord Roberts, who held a conference with him at Belfast, and communicated to him his plan for combined action.

The country to be traversed was difficult in the extreme, and the Boer position almost as strong as it had been before Ladysmith. The fighting began on the 26th of August. Some ground was gained, and on the following morning Buller launched his infantry against the strong ridge held by the enemy. Pole-Carew attacked the centre, and French, with two cavalry brigades, the left. The Boers for a time defended themselves well, and the colonel of the Rifles, with eight other officers and seventy men, were killed or wounded, but on the following day the enemy were retreating all along the line. French pushed on with his cavalry to Watervalonder, and was there joined by eighteen hundred British prisoners, which number included the nine hundred carried off from Pretoria, the rest having been captured in the many fights that had taken place since.

On September 3rd Lord Roberts sent Ian Hamilton to turn the position of the Boers facing Buller. Strong as it was it was captured with comparatively little loss. A week later Kruger fled to Lourenço Marques, forsaking the country he had ruined and the people he had deceived, caring only to cling to his ill-gotten treasures. Already Lord Roberts had issued the proclamation of annexation. On September 24th Pole-Carew with the Guards marched into Komati Poort.

From this moment the war as a war was over; fighting continued for months, but it was guerilla warfare. Botha still held a force together, De Wet and Delarey still carried out dashing raids; and although early in December Lord Roberts returned home, and Kitchener became commander-in-chief, matters were still unsettled. The efforts of our infantry to come up with the mobile Boers, who were always able to obtain remounts from the farmers, were altogether useless. The cavalry were too few to restrain the operations of a foe who could move rapidly from place to place over many square miles, strike a blow, and disappear, and twenty thousand more mounted men, besides other reinforcements, were sent out from England in the spring of 1901.

Before these troops arrived De Wet, after the incursion into Cape Colony in hopes of getting the Boers to rise, was beaten again and again, and escaped with the greatest difficulty back into the Orange River Colony. This put an end to the guerilla fighting on a large scale.

"It may be months before we can get fairly to work again," Mr. Chambers said one morning early in December, "and I am resolved, therefore, to go home with my wife and the girls. I shall stay there with them only until leave is given for the mining population to return. Then I shall leave them in England and come back—at any rate until everything is again in thorough working order."

He had in November received news that the directors had granted Yorke the five-per-cent commission that he had recommended, and that the general meeting of shareholders had unanimously confirmed their action. Yorke had written home to his parents, and had received an answer saying how delighted they were to hear that he was done with the fighting. He had now the pleasure of sending his father an order to receive seven thousand pounds of his money lying in the hands of the company, and requesting him to invest it in the name of his mother. In January he had a visitor, for to his surprise one day Mr. Allnutt walked in. He was dressed in deep mourning.

"Why, uncle, who would have thought of seeing you! This is a pleasure."

"Well, I got your letter a fortnight ago, saying that you were a sort of *locum-tenens* here, and I determined to run up and see you before I went back to England. Your aunt died suddenly a month before. The utter disappointment of her hopes broke her down altogether, and she had aged ten years in appearance. She had learned of the death of Dirck from two men who went from here with him. They said that he was shot in the streets of Pretoria, where he had gone, it seems, to take part in that abominable plot. Two days later she was found dead in her bed. She had altered her will after that affair between you and Dirck, and had appointed another cousin, a very decent fellow, her heir. He had been in grave disfavour on account of his loyalist opinions, but she had come to see that he was right; and at any rate I am very pleased

that he has come into the place instead of Dirck. He has made a very satisfactory arrangement with me, and with the income I shall draw from the farm, and my savings, I can live very comfortably in England. Of course now, from what you told me in your last letter, you would have no idea of settling down as a farmer."

"No, indeed, uncle. I have a splendid position here before me, and I hope that, by the time I am thirty, I too may return and settle in England."

Mr. Chambers came back in September, and mining operations were soon in full swing. "Dora," he said to Yorke, "is going to be married at Christmas to an officer who went home in the same ship with us. My wife and Mary are coming back two or three months later; I shall get you to go down to Durban to meet them."

"Why, I thought they were going to stay in England?"

"Well, they have changed their minds. They both were in favour of coming back for a year or two, till I could go home for good. Mary was especially anxious to do so;" and he smiled quietly, and Yorke coloured. Maybe, possibly, Mr. Chambers and his wife had talked the matter over, and something may come of it some day.

THE END.

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M 683
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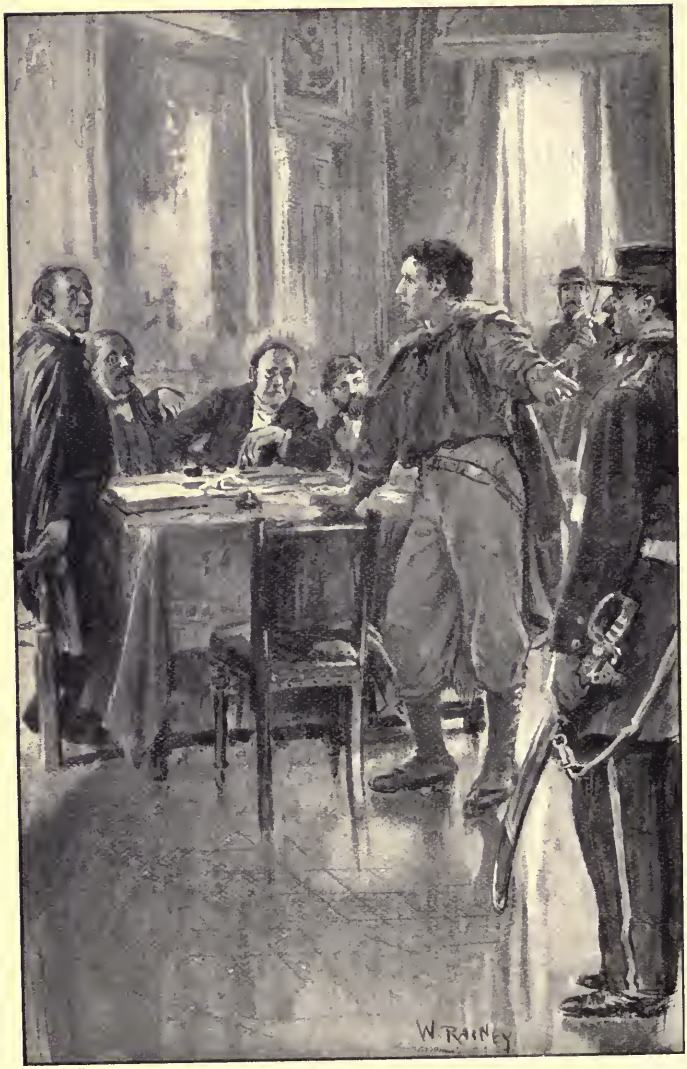

M 675

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M 705

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M 687

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